

# Minority Families and Child Support: Data Analysis

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# **The Report in Brief**

## Section One: The Report in Brief

### Recent Trends

In the past decade, a strengthened child support enforcement system closed gaps in minority-nonminority child support outcomes. Notably, the system's voluntary paternity acknowledgment program significantly increased the number of paternities established from less than 300,000 in fiscal year 1987 (U.S. House of Representatives 2000) to over 1.5 million by fiscal year 2002 (Miller 2005). In fiscal year 2002, the rate of paternity establishment for children in the IV-D program stood at 84 percent (OCSE 2003). In this study we note that 85 percent of unmarried, noncohabiting, urban White fathers had established paternity within 3 years of the birth of their child (see Section Four). For a similar group of Black fathers, 80 percent had established paternity; 77 percent of a similarly constituted group of non-White Hispanic fathers had done so.

Although the proportion of custodial mothers who received child support remained stable over the past decade, the child support enforcement system increased the proportion of African-American mothers with legal agreements from 31 percent in 1990 to 47 percent by 2002. For the first time in 2002, the percent of Black custodial mothers who had a child support order outnumbered those that did not.

Similarly, the system increased the percent of less well-off mothers who received a child support payment once they had a child support order. Child support payments for all ever-married women who had child support orders and received full payment increased slightly, while rates for never-married women increased substantially. Between 1987 and 1997, the payment rate for never-married women nearly doubled from 10 percent to 18 percent (Miller 2005). In contrast, the payment rate for ever-married women increased from about 40 percent to 42 percent (Miller 2005). Similarly, receipt rates increased for welfare recipients from 9 percent in 1980 to 26 percent in 1996 (Huang, Garfinkel, and Waldfogel 2000).

Despite these gains, child support orders and compliance rates for most minorities still lag significantly behind Whites. In 1994, the Black-White gap in child support orders was 23 percentage points (Section I, this report). That year, 66 percent of custodial White mothers and 43 percent of custodial Black mothers had orders. By 2002, that gap narrowed to 18 percentage points (66 percent of White mothers and 48 percent of Black mothers). On average, after 1994, the difference between Whites and Hispanics was 27 percentage points, between Whites and Native-Americans 24 points, and between Whites and Asian Americans, 15 points.

Racial and ethnic groups also differed in their compliance rates, defined as the rates at which mothers who had a child support order actually received a payment. In the 1990s, 62 percent of White mothers who had child support orders received a payment. Over that same period, 45 percent of Black mothers, 51 percent of non-White Hispanic mothers, 48 percent of Native-Americans and 53 percent of Asian American mothers with child support orders secured a payment.

These disparities in child support outcomes overlap critical differences in racial and ethnic family formation patterns. Most recently, the “National Vital Statistics Report” noted that more than a third of births in 2003 were to unmarried parents (34.6 percent). About one-quarter (23.5 percent) of non-Hispanic White births were to unmarried parents. Over two-thirds (68.5 percent) of non-Hispanic Black births were to unmarried parents. Sixty percent of Native-American births (61.2 percent) were nonmarital. Fifteen percent (15.1 percent) of Asian or Pacific-Islander births and 45 percent of Hispanic births were to unmarried parents.

## National Data

This study sorts through this complex picture of racial gaps, family formation differences and child support outcomes in three parts. We elaborate upon the changing and complex child support participation and payment patterns among minorities summarized above. In a second part, we consider the significance of economic and noneconomic factors that include age of child, parental involvement, and enforcement rules. We show that most differences between Whites and Blacks and Whites and Hispanics can be accounted for by urban residence and nonmarital births in a birth cohort data set. In a third part, we detail differences by immigrant status. We conclude with a number of policy, research, and commercial application recommendations.

## NATIONAL CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT PATTERNS BY RACE

Table A

**National Child Support Outcomes for Noncustodial Mothers by Race-Ethnicity  
1994–2002 from the Current Population Survey – Child Support Supplement**

	<b>1994 Order rate</b>	<b>2002 Order rate</b>	<b>Orders (1994–2002 pooled)*</b>	<b>Compliance (1994-2002)<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Degree of compliance<sup>2</sup> (1994–2002 pooled)</b>
National CPS Sample	55%	58%	56%	72%	57% of amount owed
White	66%	66%	66%	78%	62% “
African American	43%	47%	43%	62%	44% “
Hispanic (non-White)	NA	NA	42%	70%	53% “
Native American	NA	NA	51%	67%	52% “
Asian American	NA	NA	46%	68%	58% “

\* Data pooled to secure adequate sample size.

<sup>1</sup> Percent of noncustodial parents with an order who made any payment.

<sup>2</sup> The degree of compliance is equal to the amount of child support a mother received divided by the amount she was owed. In cases in which the father paid more than the amount due for a given year largely because he added back payments to his payments in that year, the compliance rates were set equal to one. Because these figures include 1990 and 1992 data, they are for illustrative purposes only.

## **African Americans**

As noted in Table A, the proportion of child support orders for African-American mothers increased from 43 percent in 1994 to 47 percent by 2002. In a weighted aggregate sample of African-American mothers for 1994-2002, only 43 percent of mothers had an order. When age, education, marital status, and number of children were taken into account, Black noncustodial mothers were half as likely (49 percent) as their White peers to have secured a legal child support order rather than to have no order. The majority (62 percent) of African-American mothers who had orders received some type of payment. Almost a third received full payments, but most received less than half the monies they were owed. Between 1994 and 2002, the African-American degree of compliance (the amount received divided by the amount owed) was 44 percent. These low payment rates may be due to several factors resulting in orders that were set too high.

## **Hispanics**

Pooled results for Hispanics resemble those of other minorities, particularly African Americans. From 1994 to 2002, the same proportion of Hispanic custodial mothers had orders as African-American mothers (42 percent). When age, education, marital status, and number of children were taken into account, Hispanic custodial mothers were half as likely (54 percent) as their White peers to have secured a legal child support order rather than to have no order. The majority (70 percent) of Hispanic mothers who had orders collected a child support payment and the average mother who received a payment collected 53 percent of the amount due her. The largest difference between Whites and Hispanic Americans is in degree of compliance, or proportion of payment received. This may be due to several factors discussed in section four of this report.

## **Native Americans**

Native-American custodial mothers resemble other minority mothers in that 51 percent of them had child support orders for the years 1994 to 2002. When age, education, marital status and number of children were taken into account, Native-American mothers were 63 percent less likely than their White peers to have secured a legal child support order rather than to have no order. Of those with orders, 67 percent collected a payment. Those who were paid received on average half what they were owed (52 percent). The major variation between Native Americans and Whites is lower compliance with the order, which could be due to several factors including orders that were set too high.

## **Reasons Mothers Do Not Have Child Support Orders**

Between 1994 and 2002, of nine reasons mothers could give in the Current Population Survey for why they had no child support order, three said, in effect, that having no order was the woman's own choice. Two other reasons were objective barriers, such as no paternity established or father could not be located. The remaining reasons were perceived barriers based on how the mother perceived the father's willingness or ability to pay or to cooperate.

- Of the three most frequently given reasons by White mothers, two were personal-choice reasons and the third was a perceived barrier.
- Two of the reasons given most frequently by African-American mothers were perceived barriers and the third was a personal choice.
- Hispanic mothers attributed their lack of an order to an objective barrier, a perceived barrier, and a personal choice among their three most frequently given replies.
- Native-American mothers said they had no orders for personal choice (2) and perceived barrier (1) reasons among their top three responses.
- Asian American mothers cited two personal-choice reasons and one perceived barrier reason among their top three replies.

### Summary

Two main points from this portrait are: (1) recent improvements in CSE have led to increases in paternity establishment and award rates and decreases in disparities; and (2) these efforts are timely because children from nonmarital births are the fastest growing share of all children in the United States (currently about one-third).

### Urban Never-Married Data

The next section determines whether these trends in nonmarital births and the overlay alluded to above between family formation patterns and child support enforcement disparities mean that large racial and ethnic differences in child support enforcement outcomes are largely the result of differences in family formation patterns. The discussion is based upon 3-year data from the “Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Survey” (FFCWS).

## URBAN NONMARITAL ENFORCEMENT PATTERNS BY RACE

Table B

Urban Child Support Outcomes for Low-Income Unwed Custodial Mothers By Race and Ethnicity – Year Three

	<b>Paternity establishment</b>	<b>Orders</b>	<b>Compliance rate</b>	<b>Degree of compliance</b>
<b>Whites</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>54%</b>
<b>African Americans</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>39%</b>
Black-White difference without controls	-6 percentage points	-6 percentage points	-18 percentage points***	-14 percentage points**
Black-White difference with controls	-4 percentage points	-6 percentage points	-14 percentage points ***	-8 percentage points
<b>Non-White Hispanics</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>53%</b>
Hispanic-White difference without controls	-9 percentage points*	-12 percentage points***	-4 percentage points	-1 percentage point
Hispanic-White difference with controls	-3 percentage points	-7 percentage points	-5 percentage points	0 percentage points

Significance tests indicate statistically significant differences between Whites and Hispanics and Whites and Blacks.

\* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001

The “Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Survey” is a representative sample of nonmarital births in large metropolitan areas that includes large samples of White, African-American, and Latino respondents. It follows children forward from birth so that researchers can identify the timing of differences in child support outcomes. It also includes previously unavailable data on fathers’ characteristics that are especially important for an analysis of compliance outcomes.

### **African Americans**

In Table B, the difference in paternity establishment rates between Blacks (80 percent) and Whites (85 percent) is not statistically significant. Thirty-eight percent of African-American mothers eligible for child support had an order [about the same as the group’s results in the Current Population Survey-Child Support Supplement (CPS-CSS) sample]. Because this Fragile Family subsample is restricted to nonmarital urban parent populations, the White-Black difference is reduced to 6 percent from the 20 percent difference in the national sample. This difference is not statistically significant from zero. When socioeconomic controls were applied, the difference remained at six percentage points.

Among African-American mothers who had orders, 58 percent received a payment. The Black-White compliance difference without controls is 18 percentage points. This difference was highly significant, and a full model applying both socioeconomic and noneconomic controls only reduced this difference to 14 percentage points – still a significant difference. The amount that fathers actually paid was only 39 percent of the amount due. This is 14 percentage points less than the proportion of payments White mothers received, a significant difference. The full model reduced the difference to 8 percentage points, which was no longer statistically significant.

### **Non-White Hispanics**

Within 3 years after urban, non-White, unwed Hispanic fathers have had a child, 77 percent have established paternity. This is 9 percent below the comparable rate for urban unwed Whites, and the difference is significant. When socioeconomic controls are applied, the difference is reduced to 3 percentage points, a difference that is no longer significant.

A smaller proportion of urban Hispanic mothers had child support orders (32 percent) than Hispanic mothers in the national CPS-CSS sample (40 percent). Within the urban sample, the difference in child support orders between White and Hispanic mothers was reduced to 12 percent from the 20-percent White-Hispanic difference in the national sample (see Table A). The 12-percent White-Hispanic difference in the Fragile Families data is statistically significant. When socioeconomic controls were applied, the difference fell to 7 percentage points and was no longer significant. There was little difference among urban Whites and Hispanics in their compliance rates (4 percentage points), a difference that was not significant. Similarly, the amount paid by urban Hispanic fathers toward the total amount due (53 percent) was comparable to the rate that White fathers paid (54 percent).

Nonmarital birth and urban residence were the most often-cited factors explaining minority-nonminority child support outcomes. Even without taking other demographic factors into account, at year 3, urban Black nonresident parents were as likely to have established paternity and have child support orders as their urban, White nonresident counterparts. There were no significant differences in payment outcomes between Hispanic and White mothers who had orders. The significant differences were in payment outcomes for Black and White urban mothers who had child support orders. The significant differences for Hispanic and White urban mothers were for paternity establishment and child support orders.

These results suggest that racial and ethnic child support disparities are largely due to racial and ethnic family formation differences. Black-White differences in compliance rates are the exception to this pattern and are discussed in the body of this report.

**THE ROLE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT OFFICES AND OTHER KEY VARIABLES**

Table C

	Agency Help by Race and Ethnicity 1994–2002 (CSP-CSS Pooled, as %)						
	Collect CS Owed	Get legal CS Order	Get TANF or Medicaid	Find Other Parent	Update Amount	Get Legal Agreement	Establish Paternity
White	68	51	34	25	19	17	11
African-American	59	63	48	32	15	17	14
Hispanic	53	51	51	38	13	15	12
Native-American	55	44	40	34	17	18	10
Asian	59	46	33	26	13	8	13

As shown in Table C, among urban, unwed parents, contact with a child support enforcement agency was the most significant predictor of having paternity established or having a child support order. Contact increased order levels by 20 percentage points. Specifically, mothers who did not have an order at the 1-year mark and obtained help from a child support agency at that point were 19 percentage points more likely to have such an order during the 3-year survey than mothers who did not get help. Contact with the child support agency was not predictive of receiving payments from the father once an order was in place.

Despite welfare reform requirements in 1996 that mothers contact child support agencies for help securing child support orders and payments, the percent of mothers who contacted OCSE agencies reached a plateau between 1994 and 1996 and then declined to 33.6 percent by 2002. This may be due to smaller TANF rolls under welfare reform’s impact. White mothers were most interested in help with compliance issues (68 percent). African-American mothers were interested in securing orders (63 percent) and compliance issues (59 percent). Hispanic, Native-American and, Asian parents were most interested in help with compliance issues (53, 55 and 59 percent).

## **The Hispanic Puzzle – Fragile Families and the New York Social Indicators Survey**

At recent forums hosted by the Office of Child Support Enforcement researchers interested in Hispanic child support enforcement outcomes frequently pointed to data limits in developing a clearer picture of the group's internal complexities. There is little data distinguishing child support differences within Hispanic subcommunities (e.g., Mexican-American, Puerto-Rican, Cuban, other Latin-American, and other Caribbean nations of origin). To create an adequate Hispanic population with CPS CSS data, for example, researchers must pool biannual surveys, and even then the sample is not large enough for analysis of Hispanic subcommunities.

To address those concerns in part, we relied upon the New York City Social Indicators Survey and its comparisons within the Hispanic community between U.S.-born and foreign-born families (from Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Cuba, etc.) and comparisons within the Black community between U.S.-born and foreign-born families (from Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad, etc). In New York City, foreign-born parents within each community had better child support outcomes than their U.S.-born counterparts.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Policy**

In recent years, the Office of Child Support Enforcement has focused on special populations such as Native Americans and other minority groups, especially African-Americans and Hispanics.

Efforts should be made to accelerate establishment of orders for all minority groups, but note should be taken of the differences among groups in developing strategies, as follows:

- Efforts to improve marriage rates for minority couples and establish close paternal connections through marriage education and/or access and visitation may encourage better compliance over time.
- All minority groups need assistance to improve income stability of fathers as controls for economic factors did make a difference. Such programs hold little promise unless they include more intensive, better managed, and more effective employment services. Also, given the effects of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) on employment gains of less-educated women, work supports and incentives targeting less-educated men may also be helpful. These could come in the form of earnings supplements, conditional on child support compliance, and increases in the child support pass-through.
- Compliance in terms of percentage of orders paid is especially problematic for African-Americans and Hispanics (Native Americans were not measured) and may mean that orders are too high for these low-wage earners due to imputed income to minimum orders as indicated by other studies.
- Efforts to maintain in-hospital paternity programs are critical.

- Child support efforts to set up orders for more of those with established paternity are critical.
- Efforts to increase orders among Hispanic fathers and compliance among Black fathers will have to become more nuanced. Reducing cultural barriers that may discourage Hispanic (or foreign-born) mothers from utilizing child support services may be key to the first objective.

## **Research**

- Extend this analysis to the fifth wave of the “Fragile Family Survey” and decompose Hispanic outcomes by subcommunities.
- Update the CPS–CSS results and apply birth cohort simulations that replicate the “Fragile Family” study and demonstrate whether Fragile Family results can be obtained from a national sample.
- Use the “Fragile Families” data set to decompose and evaluate Hispanic populations by region and subgroup. We recommend a follow-up study to take advantage of that “Fragile Families” data capacity and resolve these differing outcomes between the “Fragile Families” and New York Social Indicators Survey.

# **Introduction and Background**

## **Section Two: Introduction and Background**

### **A. Introduction**

Currently, almost half (44 percent) the nation's custodial parents are minorities but minority and nonminority mothers and fathers participate very differently in the child support enforcement system. Noncustodial African-American, Hispanic and Native-American men have fewer orders than their White peers and comply less frequently with the orders they do have.

These disparities in child support outcomes overlap differences in how American racial and ethnic groups form families. Currently more than a third of births are to unmarried parents (34.6 percent). About one-quarter (23.5 percent) of non-Hispanic White parents had a nonmarital birth. Over two-thirds (68.5 percent) of non-Hispanic Black parents did so. Sixty percent of Native-American births (61.2 percent) were nonmarital. Fifteen percent (15.1 percent) of Asian or Pacific-Islander births were to unmarried parents, as were 45 percent of Hispanic births (National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol. 52, No. 10, December 17, 2003, revised June 2004, Table 17).

In the past, a one-size-fits-all approach to these very different family formation patterns reinforced or even contributed to child support enforcement disparities (Legler 2003). Now the Office of Child Support Enforcement is interested in focusing on minorities in order to address disparities. OCSE (March 2004) recently launched a Native-American Initiative; and there are African-American, Hispanic and Asian-Pacific-Islanders Initiatives in the area of Healthy Marriage. Annual sessions have been held with practitioners interested in African-American and Hispanic child support problems.

This study suggests ways in which the agency can augment its outreach to minorities based on its analysis of three new and updated data sources on attitudes and behaviors of custodial mothers and noncustodial fathers. The CPS-CSS is the first of these data sources, which we use to update current child support enforcement outcome differences among Blacks, Hispanics, Whites, Native Americans and Asians. The "Princeton University-Columbia University Fragile Families Study" is our second data source; and we use it to account for differences we found among Whites, Blacks and Hispanics in the CPS-CSS study. We restrict the "Fragile Families" data set to unwed, noncohabiting parents who are eligible for child support and determine that such a sample yields results that largely account for minority-nonminority child support differences. The results help policymakers determine which recent initiatives have worked and where new initiatives may be required. The "New York City Social Indicators" project is our third data source; we use it to assess child support outcome differences between native-born and immigrant Blacks and Hispanics. In a final section, we summarize the report and present the policy implications of this new research.

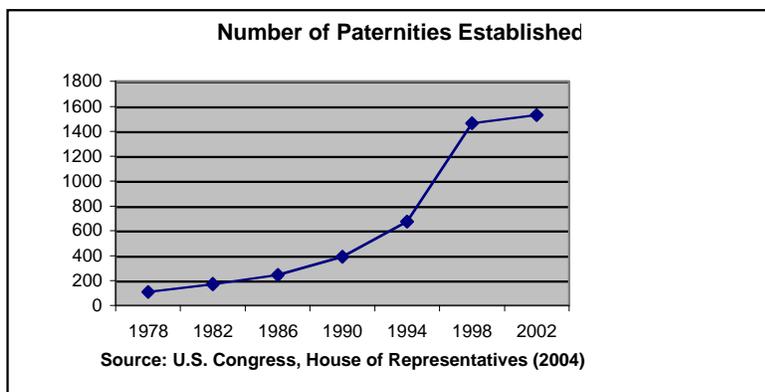
## B. Background Information

In its simplest expression, the successful enforcement of child support requires only four steps: locate the father (if necessary); establish paternity (if necessary); establish a legal child support order; and collect the payment. The child support order legally obliges nonresident parents to provide financial support/alimony/medical support for their children or ex-spouse and stipulates the amount of the obligation and payment period and method.

The last two steps include the following interim stages: (1) the custodial parent (usually the mother) or State or local OCSE agency can ask the court or other agency to issue a child support order; and (2) the process of setting up an order by OCSE involves opening a child support case, locating the nonresident parent, establishing paternity, determining a support order and amount and withholding payments from wages or other combination of enforcement techniques. Without establishing a legal child support order, the likelihood of collecting formal child support payment is low.

Notice that at each step, the custodial mother, the child support enforcement agency, the noncustodial father or some combination of the three must take critical action to move the process along.

Figure 1<sup>3</sup>



## C. Recent Activities – The Importance of In-Hospital Paternity

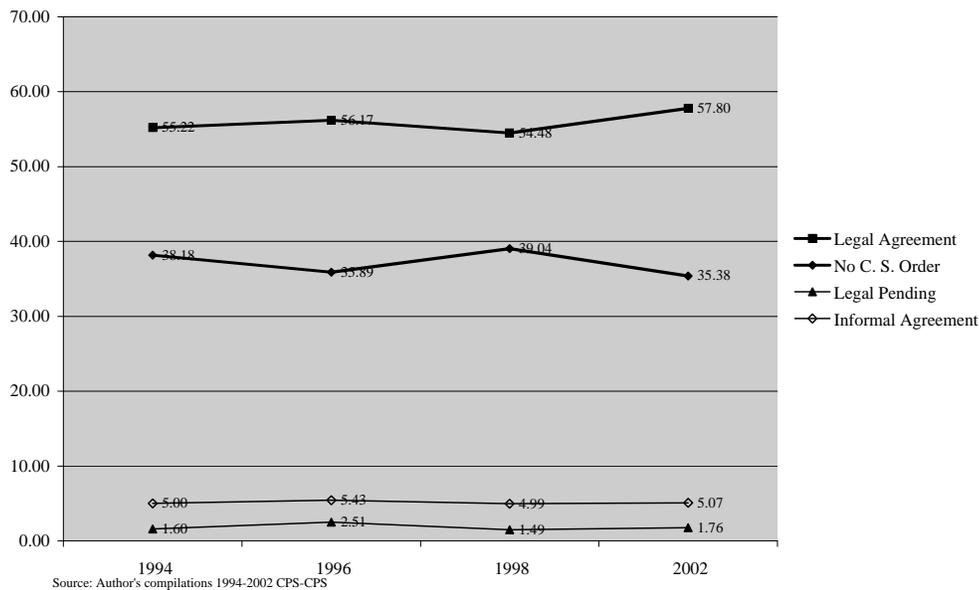
In the last decade, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) has had a significant impact upon what each of those three actors is now required to do. To reinforce paternity establishment, for example, PRWORA streamlined the legal processes for establishment and required States to adopt voluntary and in-hospital paternity establishment programs. PRWORA also required States to

<sup>3</sup> Please note that the specific large increase for 1998 probably reflects changes in data reporting made by the Office of Child Support Enforcement that make much of the data reported before that year not comparable with data that follows.

develop the capacity to monitor all child support payments and to administer universal withholding (Huang and Pouncy).

Welfare reform and other recent changes in the child enforcement system mandated substantial new behaviors by custodial mothers and child support agencies, including a streamlined legal process for paternity establishment; voluntary, in-hospital paternity establishment programs; and mandatory genetic testing in contested cases. Welfare reform also established a National Directory of New Hires that matches State directories of fathers and facilitates interstate enforcement of child support obligations. In short, the agency seeks to make child support payment as mandatory and as automatic as possible (Garfinkel, Meyer, & McLanahan 1998; Legler 1996). The results that are relevant to a study of racial disparity have been dramatic. As Figure 1 details, PRWORA more than doubled the number of paternities established.

**Figure 2: Child Support Orders 1994-2002**

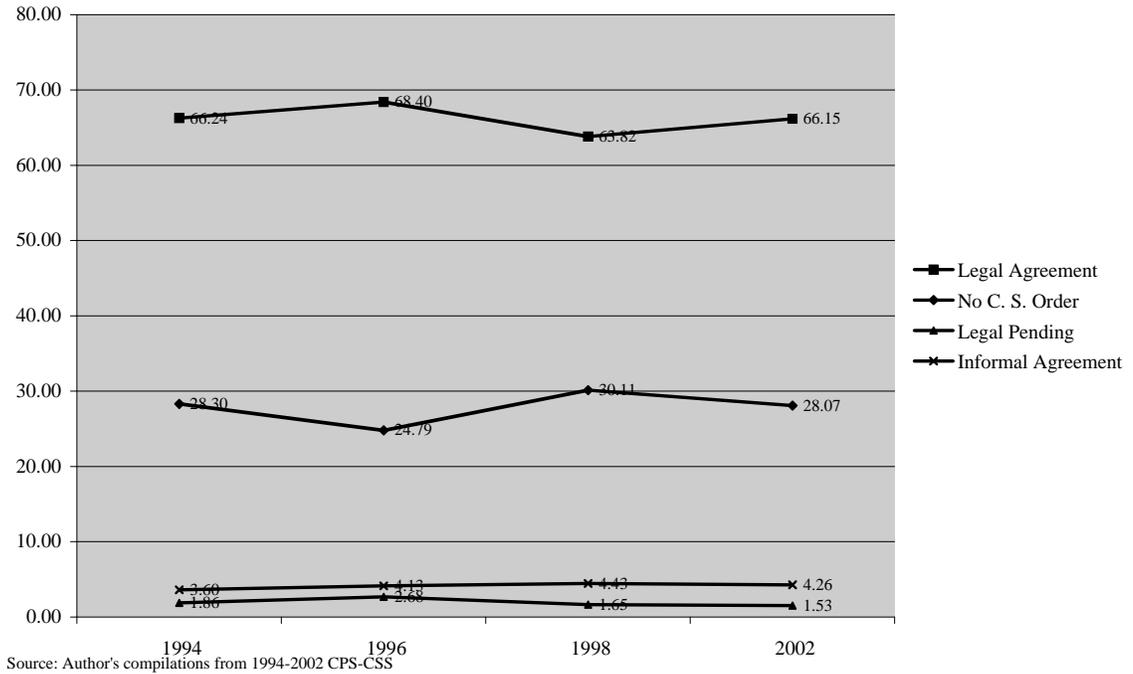


As can be seen in Figure 2, aggregate changes in the 1990s prompted by PRWORA and other child support enforcement reforms have had less visible impact on the percent of eligible mothers who secured child support orders.<sup>4</sup> The proportion with an order rose only

<sup>4</sup> Changes to the 1994 April CPS supplement do not allow for comparisons with CPS data collected before that year (2001 Census Bureau Report, Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support). Those changes include, “refining the screening of potential respondents; restructuring the questionnaire to accommodate computerizing the survey; revising terminology that refers to types of child support agreements or awards; increasing the detail in questions about the amount of child support due; including overdue child support (back support) in the amount of child support due; and adding new questions on pass-through payments (child support collected for public assistance recipients by a State enforcement office, some of which passes through to recipients).”

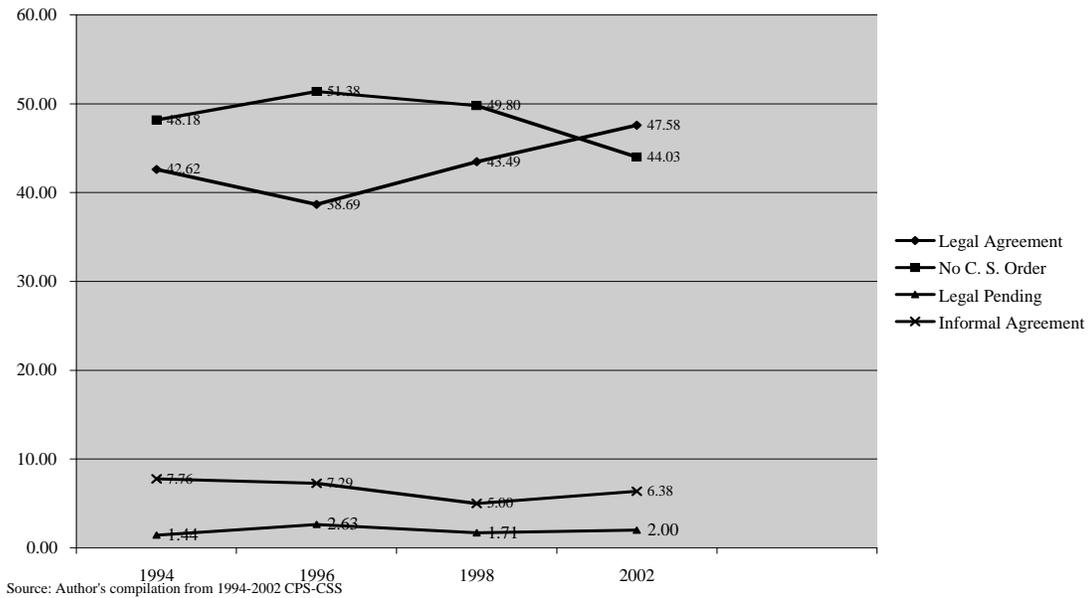
modestly, from 55 percent in 1994 to 58 percent in 2002 (CPS-CSS). Child support enforcement reforms are slightly more visible among mothers who did not have a child support order of any sort. That percentage declined significantly, from 38 percent in 1994 to 35 percent in 2002.

**Figure 3: Child Support Orders, White Mothers 1994-2002**



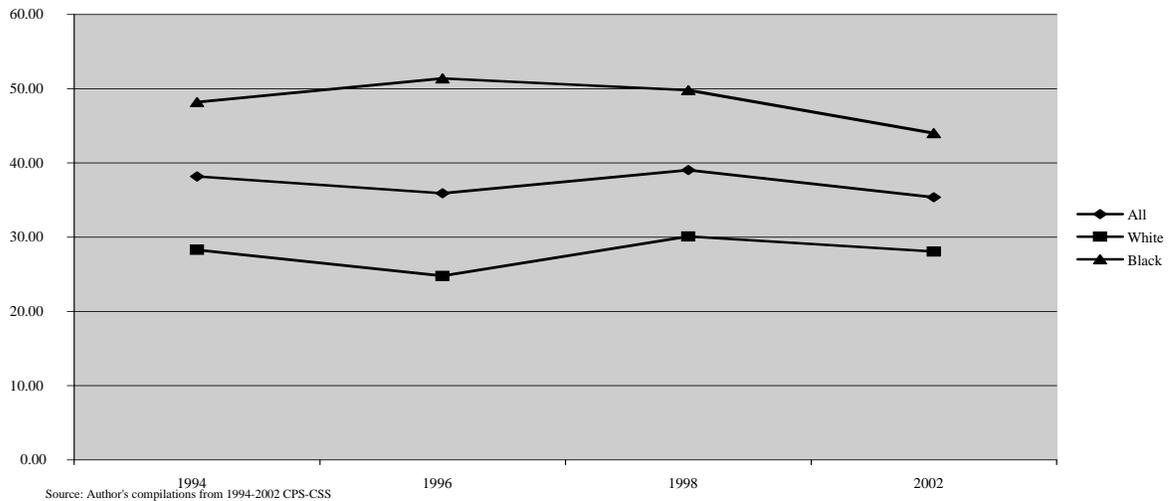
By contrast, the impacts of reforms are greatly visible in the differential impacts of child support enforcement reforms by race. The outcomes for White custodial mothers appear flat (Figure 3). The proportion of White mothers with orders held steady from 66 percent in 1994 to 66 percent in 2002. The percentage of those who had no order also held steady.

Figure 4: Child Support Orders, African-American Mothers 1994-2002



The results for African-American mothers in the same period have been dramatic (Figure 4). For the first time in the period observed by this study, more African-American custodial mothers had child support orders (47 percent) than did not (44 percent). In 1996, 51 percent of African-American mothers did not have an order. By 2002, that figure had dropped to 44 percent.

Figure 5: Trends in No Child Support Order by Race



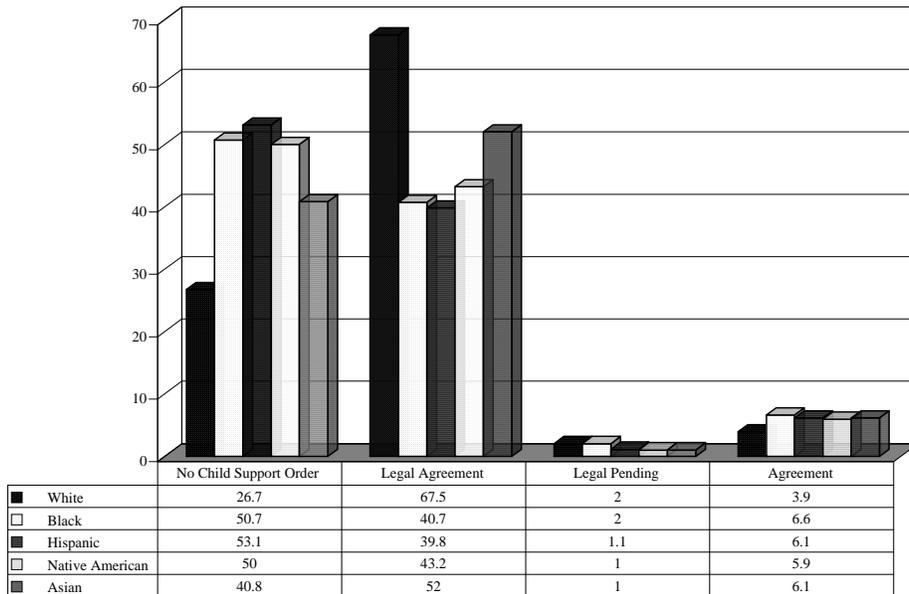
Accompanying these large changes are persistent continuities. Disparities have abated but not disappeared (Figure 5). The Black-White gap in child support orders fell from 20 percent in 1994 to 15 percent by 2002 and that remaining gap is significant.

## **General U.S. Findings**

### Section Three: General U.S. Findings

In this analysis of a pooled CPS-CSS sample for the years 1994 to 2002, we conclude the following: (1) Even taking into account the economic and demographic variables available to this data set, significant racial-ethnic differences in the child support order rate remain. (2) Minority mothers point to barriers or perceived barriers that prevent them from having a child support order, and nonminority mothers are more likely to say that not having a child support order was a personal choice. (3) Except for Hispanics, significant racial gaps remain in child support compliance if there is a child support order. And (4) although custodial mothers varied in how frequently they contacted child support or TANF agencies over the 1990–2002 period, they reported increased rates of help establishing paternity and seeking child support orders throughout the period; as we note elsewhere in this report, such contacts are the most significant factor in accounts for why mothers have child support orders.

Figure 6: Pooled Attributes by Race 1994-1998



#### A. How Many Noncustodial Mothers Have a Child Support Order?

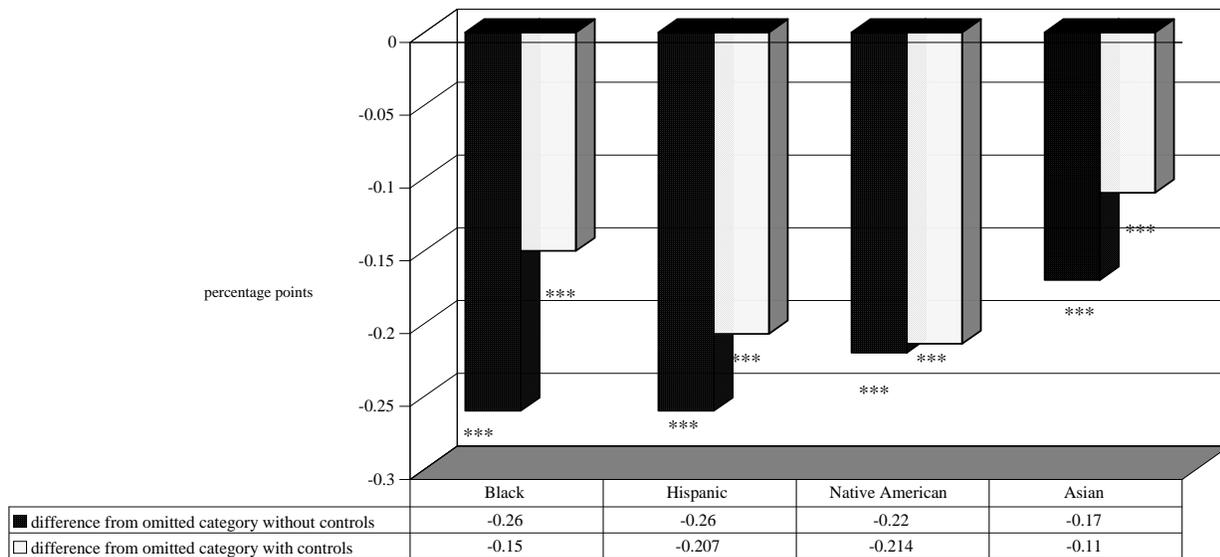
In this pooled<sup>5</sup> sample the majority of custodial mothers (55.1 percent) had child support orders, but there were great racial differences. Almost 70 percent of White custodial mothers had a child support order. Half of African-American, Hispanic and Native-

<sup>5</sup> The CPS-CSS contains child support enforcement data for each minority group. With the exception of African-Americans, in any given year, the sample size for other minority groups is too small for reliable statistical analysis. Accordingly, data is combined or pooled from 1994 to 1998 (and for some analyses 1994 to 2002). Native Americans have the smallest pooled sample size (100+), a good size given their population.

American mothers did not. A majority of Asian American mothers had an order or an informal agreement.

When age, education, marital status, and number of children are taken into account, the percentage difference between Black and White mothers is reduced from 26 to 15 points (Figure 7), with Black mothers now half as likely (Appendix 1) to have a child support order as their White peers ( $p < .001$ ). The percentage difference between Hispanic and White mothers is reduced from 26 to 20 points, with Hispanic mothers also half as likely to have an order (Appendix 1) as their White peers ( $p < .001$ ). The percentage difference was smallest for Native Americans. After age, education, marital status and number of children were taken into account, the percentage difference between Native-American and White mothers was reduced only from 22 percent to 21 percentage points, with Native-American mothers almost two-thirds less likely to have an order than their White peers. After controls were applied, the percentage difference between Asian American and White mothers fell from 17 to 11 points ( $p < .01$ ).

Figure 7a: Racial and Ethnic Differences in Child Support Orders with and without Controls



Source: 1994-1998 CPS-CSS

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

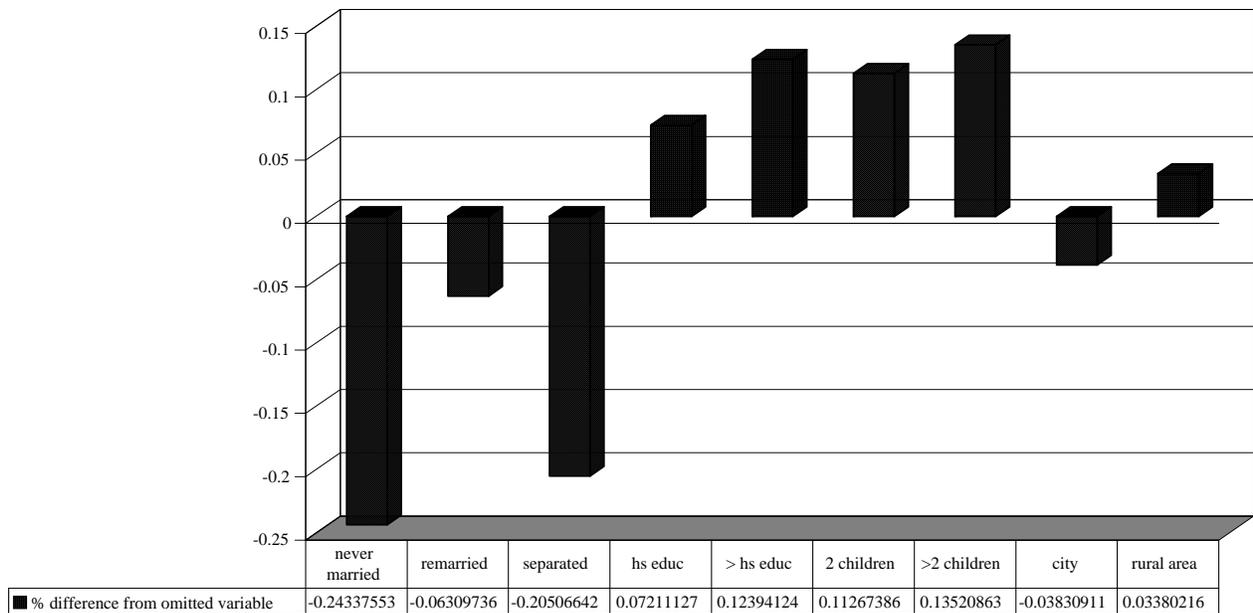
Child support outcomes differed by marital status even more greatly than they did by race. After controls for age, race, education, and number of children were applied, the difference in child support orders between never-married and divorced mothers was 24 percentage points (Figure 7a) ( $p < .001$ ). The difference between separated and divorced mothers was

20 percentage points ( $p < .001$ ) and that between remarried and divorced mothers only 6 points ( $p < .001$ ).

Education also had significant effects. With age, race, marital status, and number of children controlled, the percentage difference between mothers with some but not a complete high school education was 7 points ( $p < .001$ ). The difference between mothers with an education beyond high school and mothers without a high-school education was 12 percentage points ( $p < .001$ ).

Mothers with more than one child also had greater rates of child support orders than mothers with only one child. With age, education, race, and marital status controlled, there was a difference of 11 percentage points between mothers with two children, and mothers with only one child. The difference between mothers with more than two children and mothers with one child was three percentage points ( $p < .001$ ).

Figure 7b: Effects of Significant Demographic Factors on Child Support Orders



Source: 1994-1998 CPS-CSS

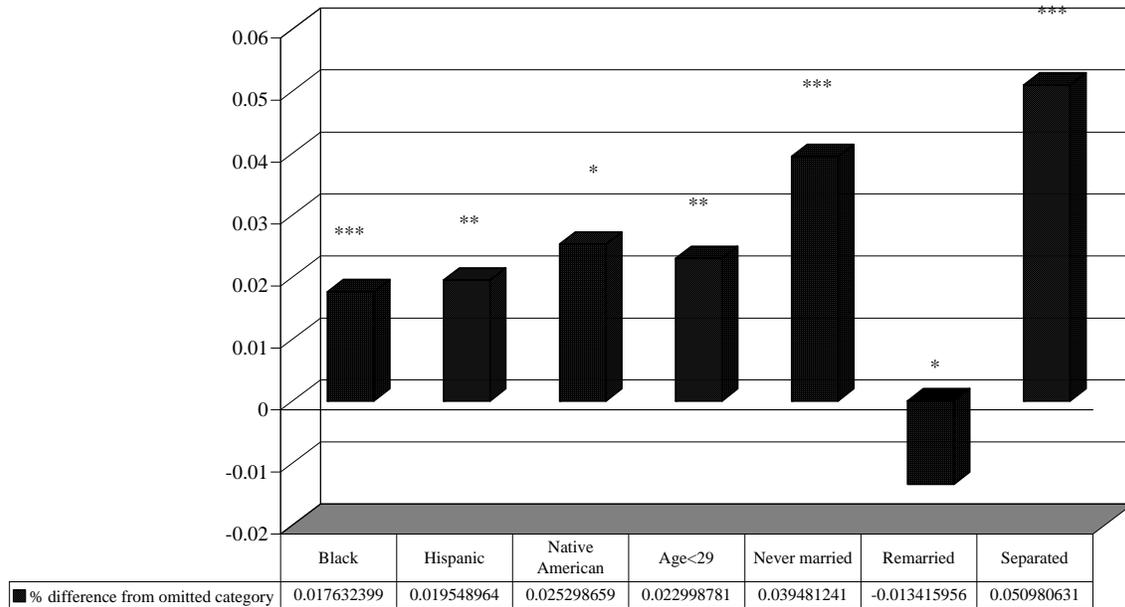
\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

omitted categories = divorced, <hs education, 1 child and suburban

In the last decade, a small but growing pool of mothers had an informal rather than a legal child support agreement. The group increased in size from 3 percent in 1990 to 5 percent by 2002. When age, marital status, education and number of children were taken into account, African-American, non-White Hispanic, and Native-American mothers were significantly more likely to have an informal order than their White peers (Figure 8). There was a difference of 2 percentage points between Black and Hispanic mothers and their

White peers ( $p < .001$  and  $p < .01$ ). There was a 2.5 percentage point difference between Native-American and White mothers ( $p < .05$ ).

Figure 8: Significant Correlates of Informal Rather Than Legal Orders



Source: 1994-1998 CPS-CSS \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$  omitted categories = whites, divorced, <hs education, 1 child and suburban

The largest differences in the informal pool were differences by marital status. When age, race, education, and number of children were taken into account, separated mothers had a 5-point and never-married mothers had a 4-point higher rate of informal orders than their divorced peers.

## B. The Mother’s Story: Why Doesn’t She Have a Child Support Order?

In the simple child support enforcement model we outlined in Section 2B, the unstated assumption was that mothers, child support agencies, and fathers cooperated to provide for children’s well-being. In reality, mothers and fathers defect from the process and local agencies may be inattentive or ineffective. In this section, we hear the mother’s side of the story about why she does not have an order and under what circumstances she herself defects from the process versus when she reports that the father and/or the child support agency are responsible for her not having an order. The current version<sup>6</sup> of the CPS-CSS

<sup>6</sup> Before the 1994 CPS-CSS, the wording of the questions, the number of responses a mother could give and her guidelines changed significantly from survey to survey. As Joyce Pitts, Director of Planning, Research and Evaluation at OCSE notes in hindsight, these revisions make it inadvisable to compare pre-1994 results with results after. We agree with this assessment and we suggest a re-assessment with 1994-2004 CPS-CSS data.

survey lists the nine reasons mothers without orders can choose for explaining why they have no order:

*Personal Reasons*

- (1) I did not want legal involvement;
- (2) I did not want contact with the father;
- (3) I did not want the father to pay child support

*Barriers*

- (4) Paternity was not established;
- (5) Unable to locate father;

*Perceived Barriers*

- (6) The father cannot afford child support;
- (7) The father provides what he can;
- (8) Child with father part of the time

*Indeterminate or Other*

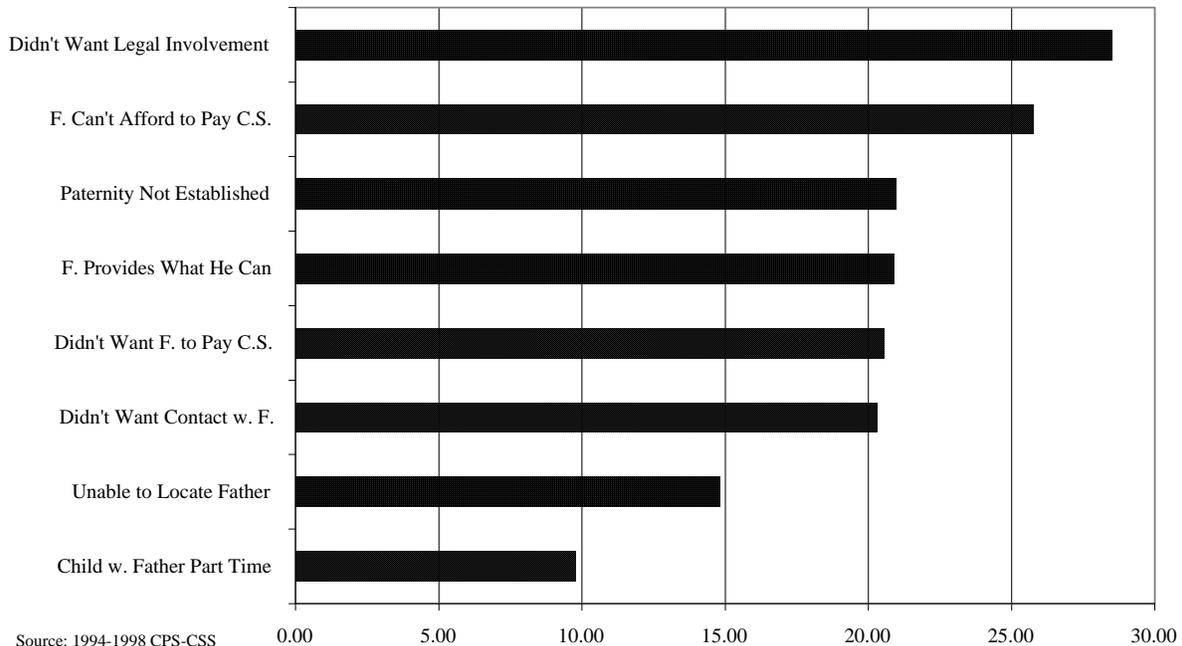
- (9) Other.

The first three reasons are cases in which the mother states that it is her own choice not to have an order, either because she wants no involvement with the system or she wants no contact or no money from the father. The next two reasons are cases in which the mother faces an actual barrier (paternity not established or father not found) to securing an order. Reasons six through eight are cases where the mother also faces barriers, but the barriers are her perceptions of the father's capacities or his actions (he spends time with the child). The final category of "other" is indeterminate.

In 1994, before welfare reform took effect, the most frequently given reason for not having an order was "father cannot afford child support" (30.4 percent). After the 1996 reform and its requirement that dependent mothers secure child support orders, the most frequently cited reason shifted to "did not want legal involvement" (29.8 percent). Presumably, mothers who said that the father could not afford child support had included a disproportionate number of mothers on welfare. In many cases, after the 1996 welfare reforms, these mothers were required to apply for an order and secured them. Such a shift would decrease the frequency of mothers who reported that the father could not afford child support and increase the proportion of mothers not on welfare who said that they did not want legal involvement.

When we pooled the entire 1994–2002 sample (Figure 9a), the personal-choice reason "did not want legal involvement" emerged as the most frequently cited response (28.4 percent), followed by the father-based barrier reason "father cannot afford child support" (25.7 percent). The next four most frequently given responses clustered in the mid-20 percent range and included a barrier reason ("paternity not established"); a father-based barrier ("father provides what he can"); and two personal-choice reasons ("did not want father to pay" and "did not want contact"). The least frequently cited reasons were the barrier "unable to locate father" and the father-based barrier "child with father part-time."

**Figure 9a: Frequency with which Mothers Cited Reasons They Had No Child Support Order**

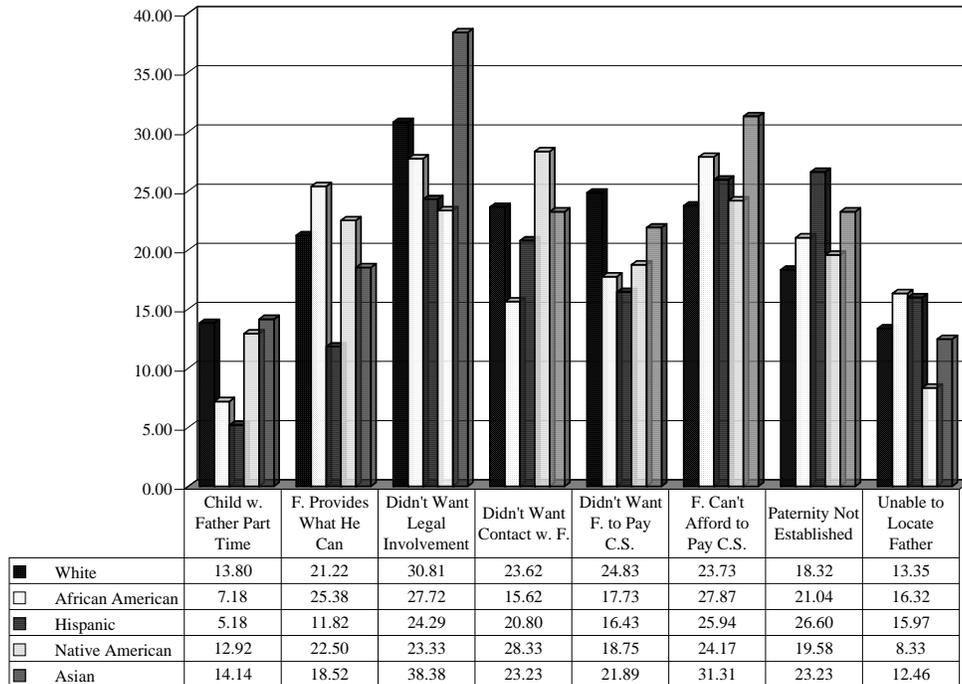


When we matched response and the mother's race (Figure 9b), we found the following:

- (1) The top three responses from White mothers included two personal-choice reasons and one perceived barrier. They did not want legal involvement (30.8 percent); they did not want the father to pay (24.8 percent); and they said the father could not afford to pay (23.7 percent).
- (2) For their three top reasons, Black mothers gave two perceived barriers and a personal choice. They said the father could not afford to pay (27.8); they did not want legal involvement (27.7 percent); and the father provided what he could (25.3 percent).
- (3) The top reasons given by Hispanic mothers included an actual barrier, a perceived barrier and a personal choice. They said paternity was not established (26.6 percent); the father could not afford to pay (25.9 percent); and they did not want legal involvement (24.2 percent).
- (4) For Native-American mothers, the most frequently cited reasons included two personal-choice reasons and one perceived barrier. They said they did not want contact with the father (28.3 percent); the father could not afford to pay (24 percent); and they did not want legal involvement (23.3 percent).

- (5) Asian American mothers gave two personal-choice reasons and one perceived barrier. They said they did not want legal involvement (38.3 percent); the father could not afford to pay (31.1 percent); and they did not want contact with him (23.2 percent).

**Figure 9b: Reasons Mothers Did Not Have Orders by Race**



After taking account of age, race, marital status, education, number of children, the effect of welfare reform, and residence, we list each reason with the significant factor(s) strongly associated with it on either positive or negative terms:

- (1) “*Did not want legal involvement.*” Mothers under 29 years of age were significantly more likely to select this reason than mothers over 39. Similarly, mothers who had gone to school beyond high school were significantly more likely to select it than mothers who had not completed high school.
- (2) “*Did not want contact with the father.*” Young mothers were more likely to give this response when compared with mothers over 39. Black mothers were significantly less likely to give this answer than White mothers, and mothers with more than two children were less likely to give it than mothers with only one child.
- (3) “*Did not want the father to pay child support.*” Blacks and Hispanics were significantly less likely to give this reason than White mothers. Mothers with more than two children were less likely to give this response than mothers with only one child.
- (4) “*The father cannot afford to pay child support.*” Urban mothers were significantly more likely to say this than suburban mothers.
- (5) “*Father provides what he can.*” Black, young, separated, rural, and better-educated mothers were all more likely to select this as a reason than mothers in the omitted

categories. Hispanic mothers were unlikely to give this reason when compared with White mothers.

- (6) “*Paternity not established.*” Hispanic, Asian, and never-married mothers were more likely to report this reason than White and divorced mothers.
- (7) “*Unable to locate father.*” Young and never-married mothers were more likely to select this response than older and divorced mothers. Mothers who had an education beyond high school were less likely to select this reason than mothers who had not completed high school.
- (8) “*Child with father part-time.*” Black, Hispanic, and never-married mothers were less likely to select as a reason than White and divorced mothers. Mothers with a high-school education or beyond were more likely to pick this reason when compared with mothers who had not completed high school.
- (9) “*Other reasons.*” Remarried and mothers with an education beyond high school were more likely to select this response than mothers in the omitted categories. Black and Hispanic mothers were more unlikely to pick this reason than White mothers.

### **Grouped Responses**

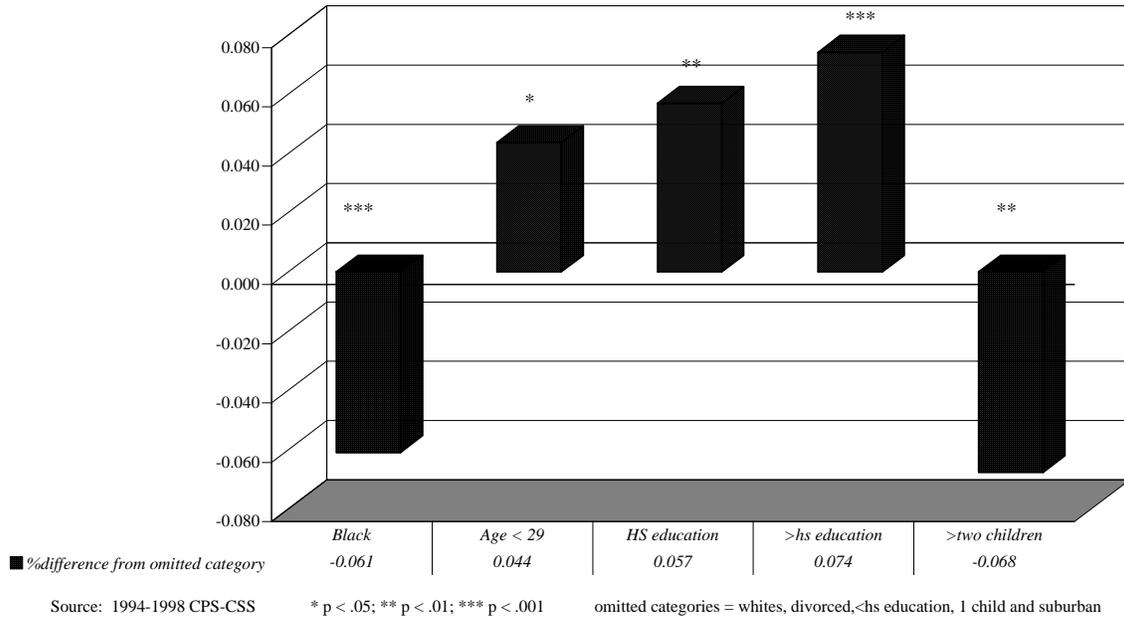
Mothers without a child support order could list as many reasons as they liked for why they had no order from the nine-item list. The average mother gave two reasons (1.6), and this raises the question whether mothers really do see this list in personal-choice versus barriers terms. If most mothers chose only personal-choice or only barrier-based reasons but not both, that would suggest that the categories are salient. If most mothers randomly mixed personal-choice and barrier-based reasons, that would suggest they assessed the list on some other basis.

The grouped response results suggest that most mothers read the list in ways that differentiate between personal-choice and barrier-based reasons. Of mothers without orders, 12 percent selected only personal-choice reasons. About half selected only barrier-based reasons (we lumped general barriers and father-based barriers together). More than a third (37 percent) gave both kinds of reasons.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> We realize that mothers who gave both kinds of reasons could also be selecting reasons that reinforce one another and match our assumptions as well. A mother who said that the father could not afford to pay child support, who then said that she did not want the father to pay, would be giving consistent responses. Similarly, a mother who did not want legal involvement but also thought the father could not afford to pay would be consistent as well. To keep the list simple enough for this multinomial logit exercise, we did not include these additional possibilities.

**Figure 10: Key Differences between Mothers Who Gave Personal Choice Reasons for Having No Child Support Order and Mothers Who Gave Barriers as Reasons**

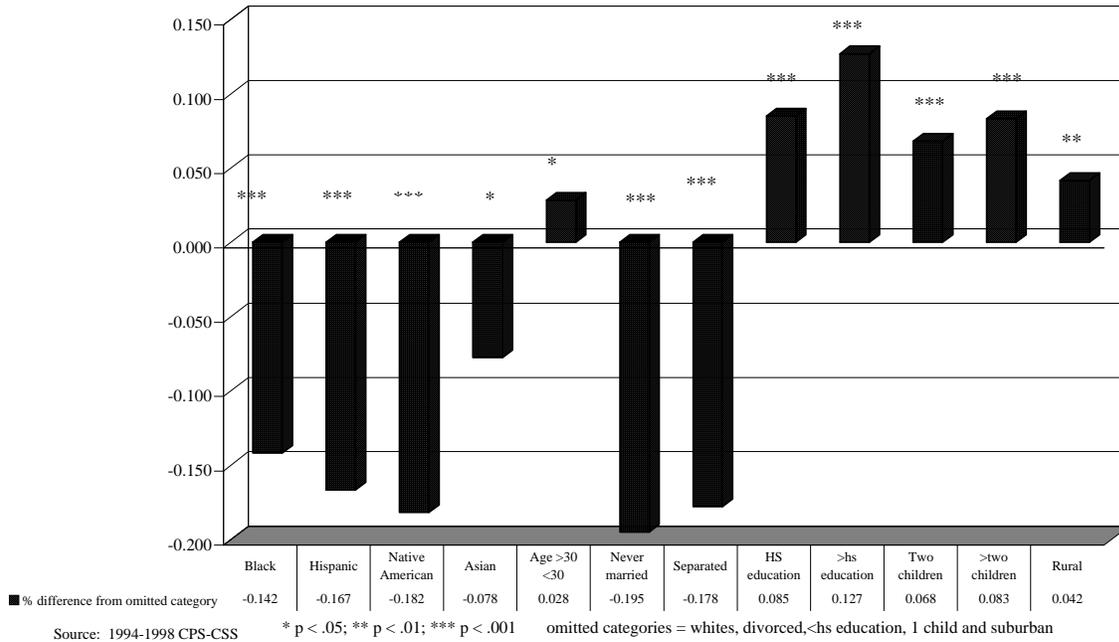


When age, education, marital status, number of children, the effects of welfare reform, and location within a metropolitan area were taken into account (Figure 10), African-American mothers were the only minority group significantly less likely to select personal-choice reasons rather than barrier-based reasons when compared with their White peers. When we compared mothers who only selected personal-choice reasons with mothers who only selected barrier-based reasons, Black mothers reported personal-choice reasons less often by 6 percentage points than their White peers ( $p < .001$ ). The only other variables that significantly differentiated mothers who selected only personal-choice reasons from mothers who only selected barrier-based ones were age, education and number of children. Mothers younger than 30 said they had no order for personal-choice reasons more often by 4 percentage points than mothers older than 40. Similarly, mothers with a high school education and mothers with more than a high school education more often cited personal-choice reasons by six and seven percentage points, respectively, than mothers who had not completed high school. Finally, mothers with more than two children cited personal-choice reasons less frequently by seven percentage points than mothers with only one child.

With the same variables taken into account as those listed above, minority mothers were significantly more likely to say that they did not have an order for barrier-based reasons than White mothers (Figure 11). When we compared mothers with orders with mothers who said barriers prevented them from having orders, Black mothers reported that they did not have orders for barrier-based reasons by 14 percentage points more than their White

peers ( $p < .001$ ). Hispanic mothers said they did not have orders for barrier-based reasons by 17 percentage points more than White mothers. Native-American mothers said they had

**Figure 11: Factors Differentiating Mothers Who Had Orders from Mothers Who Because of Barriers Did Not Have Orders**



no orders for barrier-based reasons by 18 percentage points more than their White peers. Asian mothers gave barrier-based reasons by 8 points more than White mothers ( $p < .05$ ).

When age, race, education, number of children, the effects of welfare reform, and location within a metropolitan area were taken into account, barriers were even more salient for mothers who differed from each other by marital status. Never-married mothers said that barriers prevented them from having orders by 23 percentage points more than divorced mothers listing those reasons ( $p < .001$ ). Similarly, separated mothers gave those reasons more than divorced mothers by 17 percentage points ( $p < .001$ ).

When age, race, marital status, number of children, the effects of welfare reform, and location within a metropolitan area were taken into account, barriers were less salient for mothers with more education. Mothers with a high school education and mothers with an education beyond high school were 8.5 and 12.6 percentage points less likely to say that barriers were the reasons they had no orders than mothers without a high-school education ( $p < .001$ ).

Mothers with two children and mothers with more than two children selected barriers as the reason for no orders less often by 6.8 and 8.3 percentage points, respectively, than mothers with only one child. Finally, rural mothers selected barriers less often by 4 percentage points than suburban mothers.

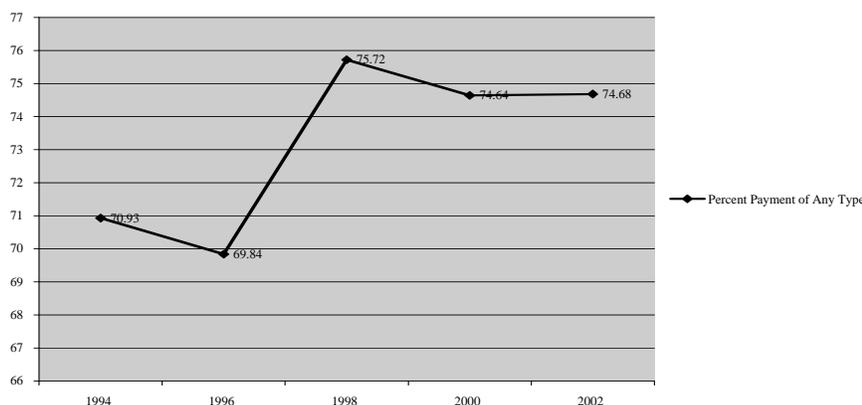
The types of reasons mothers picked varied significantly by racial and socioeconomic characteristics. African-American mothers were also unlikely to select personal-choice reasons for why they had no child support order. Mothers with two children or more were also less likely to select only personal reasons. Younger and better-educated mothers were significantly more likely to select only personal-choice reasons.

In addition, African-American and Hispanic mothers say that they want the father to pay child support, but in the case of African-American mothers they believe he provides what he can. To the extent that minority status is also associated with urban location, minority mothers also say that they do not believe the father can afford to pay child support. Hispanic mothers do not share the view that the father provides what he can. They explicitly reject that characterization. Hispanic and Asian mothers see paternity establishment as a larger problem than other mothers by race. Generally, minority mothers select barrier reasons for why they do not have child support orders, in contrast with White mothers, who are more likely to select personal-choice reasons when other demographic variables are controlled.

### C. The Father’s Story: Child Support Compliance

Once the mother (or custodial parent) has a child support order, it is the father’s (or noncustodial parent’s) responsibility to comply with the order and pay. Between 1994 and 2002, payment rates on orders improved from 70 to 75 percent (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Percent of Non-Custodial Parents with Orders Who Made Any Payment 1994-2002



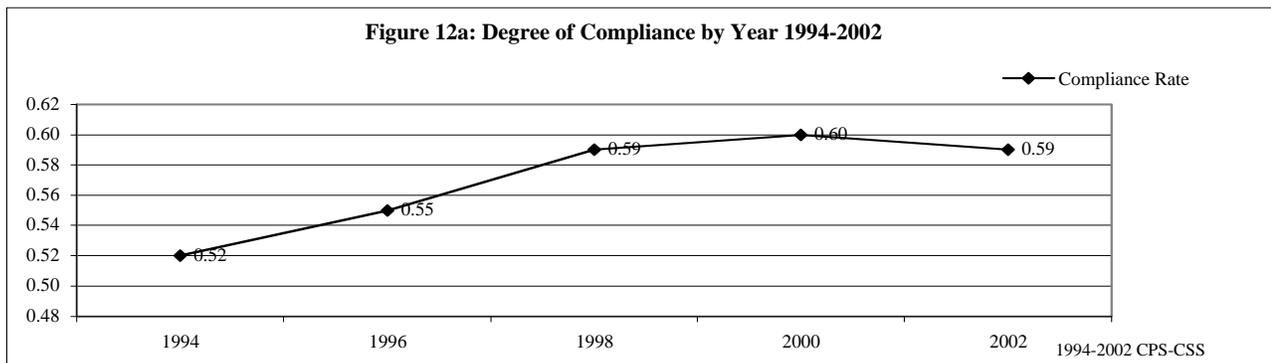
Degree of compliance<sup>8</sup> also rose between 1994 and 2002 from 52 to 60 percent (Figure 12a).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> All dollar amounts in this report are adjusted to 1997 (constant) dollars using the Consumer Price Index.

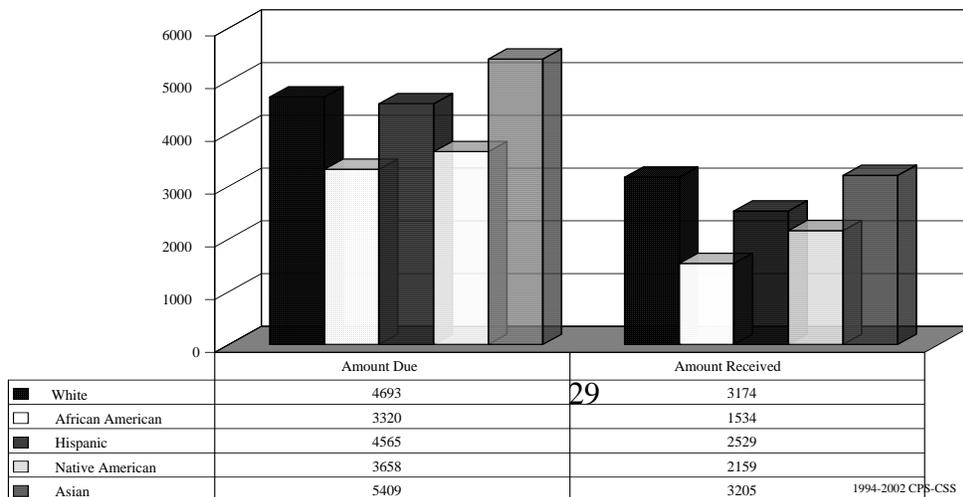
<sup>9</sup> The compliance rate is equal to the amount of child support received divided by the amount of child support due. There were 327 cases in which the father paid more than the amount due for a given year largely because he added back payments to his payments in that year. For these cases, the compliance rates were set equal to one.

In a later section of this report, we determine whether compliance gaps by race remain large after socioeconomic and demographic variables are taken into account. Here, descriptive data (Figures 12b and 12c) simply demonstrate that without controls, compliance gaps are large by race. The average amount of child support due was highest for Asian American mothers (\$5,409) and next highest for White mothers (\$4,693). These results were followed by amounts due Hispanic (\$4,565), African American (\$3,320), and Native-American (\$3,658) mothers.

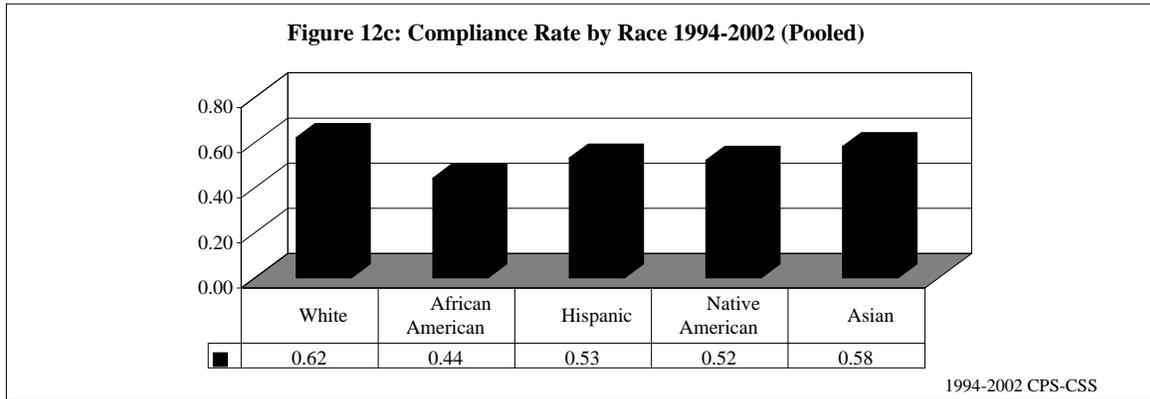
In terms of amounts actually received, Asian American and White mothers secured the most child support (\$3,205 and \$3,174, respectively), followed by Hispanic (\$2,529) and Native-American (\$2,159) mothers. African-American mothers received the least amount of child support compared to other mothers (\$1,534).



**Figure 12b: Compliance Amounts by Race 1994-2002 (Pooled)**



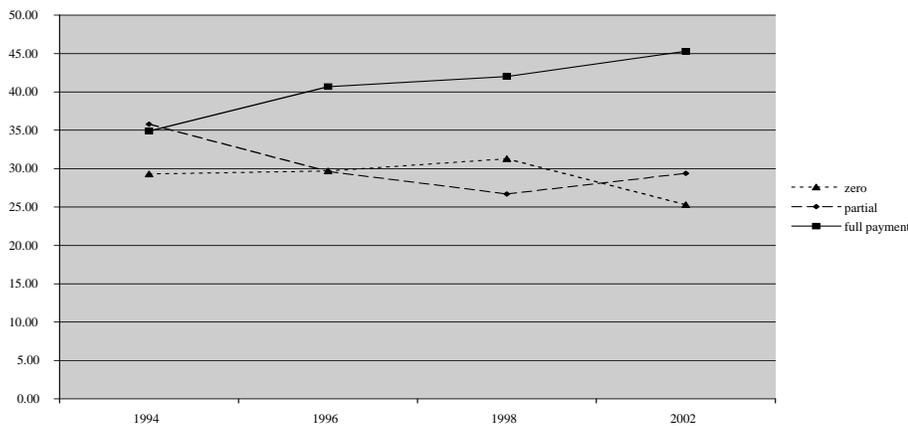
White mothers experienced the highest compliance rates (0.62), followed by Asian American (0.58), Hispanic (0.53), Native-American (0.52), and African-American (0.44) mothers.



### Types of Child Support Payment, 1994–2002

Between 1994 and 2002, the percent of custodial mothers receiving full child support payments rose 10 percentage points from 35 to 45 percent. Mothers receiving a partial payment declined by 5 points from 35 to 30 percent. The percent of mothers who received no payment (zero level) remained steady at 30 percent for 1994 and 1996 before declining 5 points to 25 percent from 1998 to 2002 (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Types of Payment 1994-2002

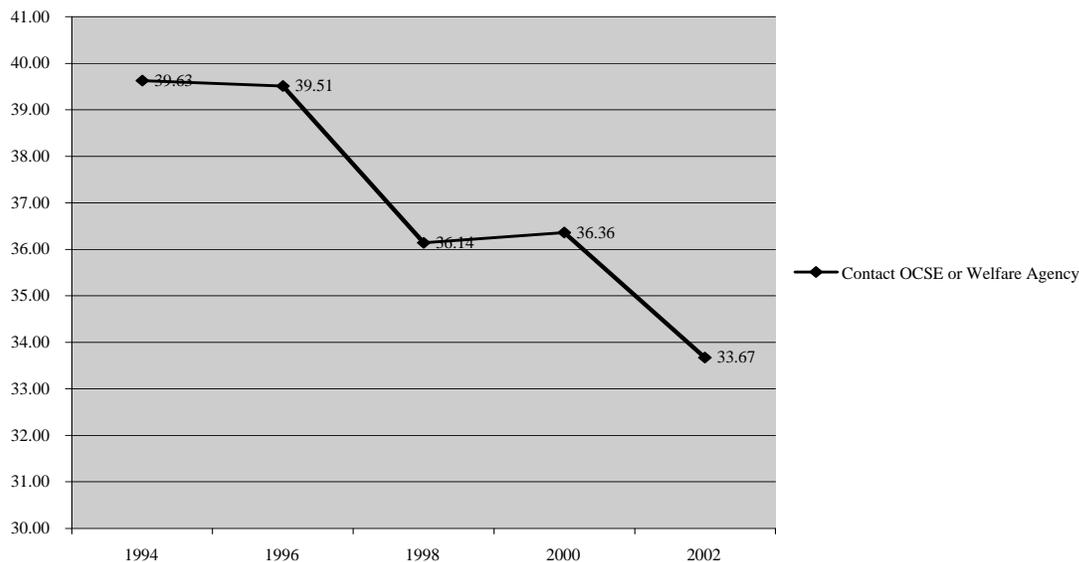


### D. The Agency’s Story: Contact with OCSE or Welfare Offices, 1994–2002

Local child support agencies are most effectively involved in the enforcement process when custodial parents contact them directly and seek help or information. Later in this report, we detail data that suggest that the variable most strongly associated with a

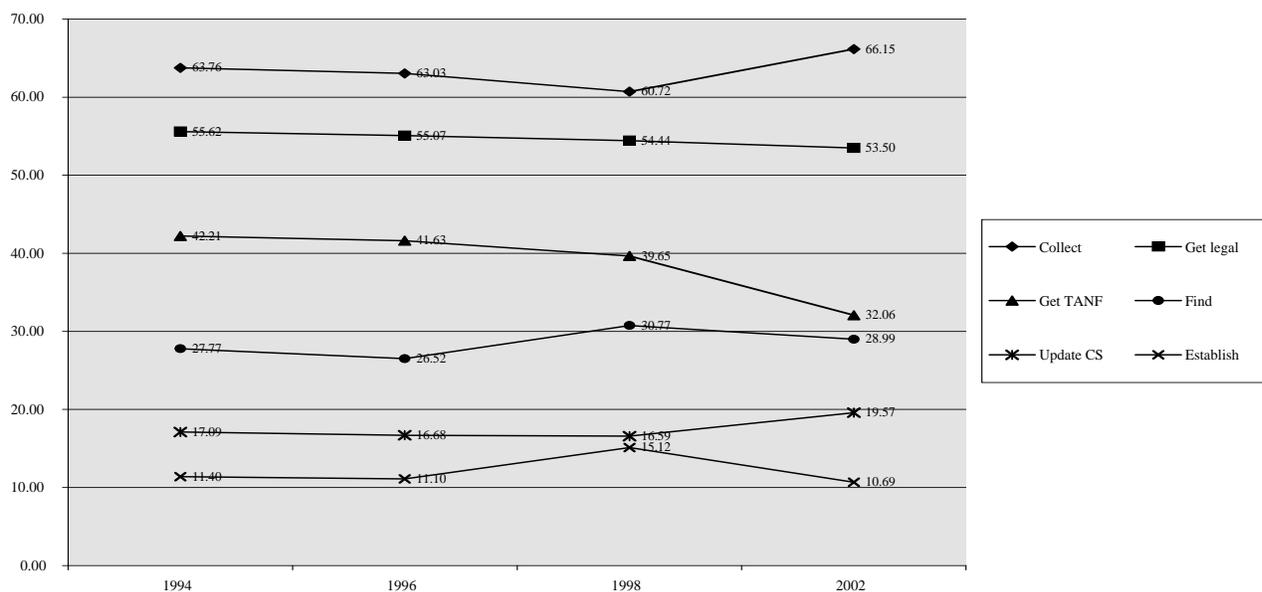
mother's success at securing a child support order is contact with a local child support enforcement agency. In this section we discuss the paradox that contact with an OCSE agency was most strongly linked to effective child support action and was mandated by the 1996 welfare reforms, but between 1996 and 2002 contact activity declined from mid-decade highs. The proportion of mothers contacting either child support or welfare agencies on child support enforcement matters declined from 39.6 percent in 1994 to 33.7 percent by 2002 (see Figure 14). The decline in contacts after 1996 reflects welfare reform's time limits and reductions in TANF contacts as the welfare rolls grew smaller.

**Figure 14: Contact OCSE or Welfare Agency 1994-2002**



Welfare reform's effects are also manifest in changes over time in the types of help mothers requested. The requests shifted from topics about entering the welfare and child support system to topics about the aftermath of entering either system. The proportion of mothers who sought help with TANF or Medicaid declined from 42 percent in 1994 to 32 percent by 2002. Strikingly, the share of mothers seeking help getting a legal order declined slightly, from 55 percent in 1994 to 53 percent by 2002. The percentage of mothers who sought help in collecting on an existing order increased from 64 percent in 1994 to 66 percent by 2002. Proportionally, mothers asking for help with finding the other parent or updating their child support amount increased from 27 to 28 percent in the first category and 17 to 20 percent in the second. Mothers contacting either agency to establish paternity (as encouraged by welfare reform) rose immediately after welfare reform but declined by 2002.

Figure 15: OCSE or TANF Help Trends by Category 1994-2002



### Race/Ethnicity

Between 1994 and 2002, almost half (47 percent) of Native-American mothers reported contact with either agency, the highest rate among any racial or ethnic group. Roughly a third of White, African-American, and Hispanic mothers contacted either agency (37, 39 and 32 percent, respectively). A quarter of Asian American mothers used agency services in this period (Figure 16).

White mothers who contacted either agency were most interested in securing help with a child support payment (68 percent), help getting an order (51 percent), or help with TANF or Medicaid (Figure 16a). They were least interested in help finding the other parent (25 percent), updating a payment amount (19 percent), getting an agreement (17 percent) or establishing paternity (11 percent). African-American mothers were most interested in help getting an order (62 percent), collecting a payment (59 percent) or TANF/Medicaid, or finding the other parent (32 percent). They were least interested in updating an amount, getting an agreement or establishing paternity. Hispanic custodial mothers were most interesting in receiving payments (53 percent), getting an order (51 percent), getting TANF or Medicaid) or finding the other parent (35 percent). As with other mothers they were least interested in updating orders or establishing paternity. Native-American mothers were equally interested in collecting payments or getting an order (55 percent) and finding the other parent (34 percent). Asian American mothers were interested in collecting payments (59 percent) and getting an order (47 percent).

Except for enforcement of child support owed, minority mothers seem to have a higher or comparable assistance rate to White mothers. It does not seem that minorities have been disadvantaged with regard to agency access.

Figure 16: OCSE or Welfare Agency Contact by Race (Pooled 1994-2002)

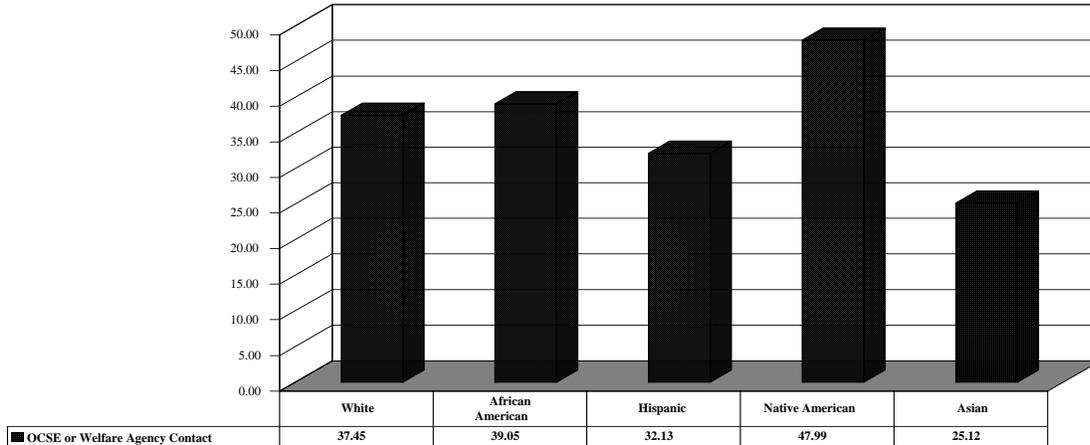
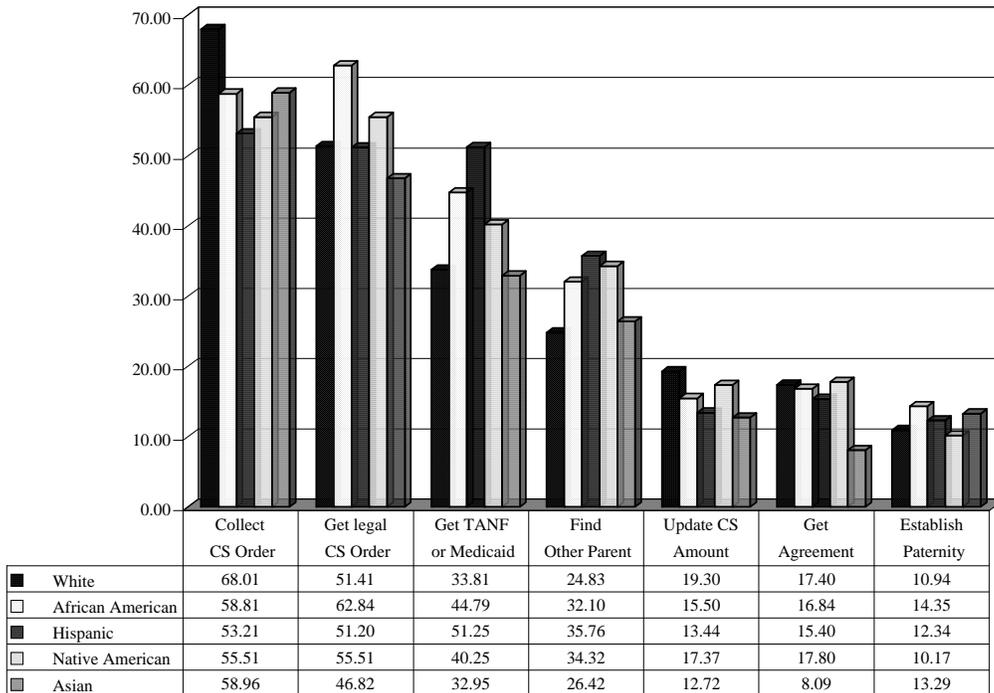


Figure 16a: OCSE and TANF Agency Help by Race - 1994-2002 (Pooled)

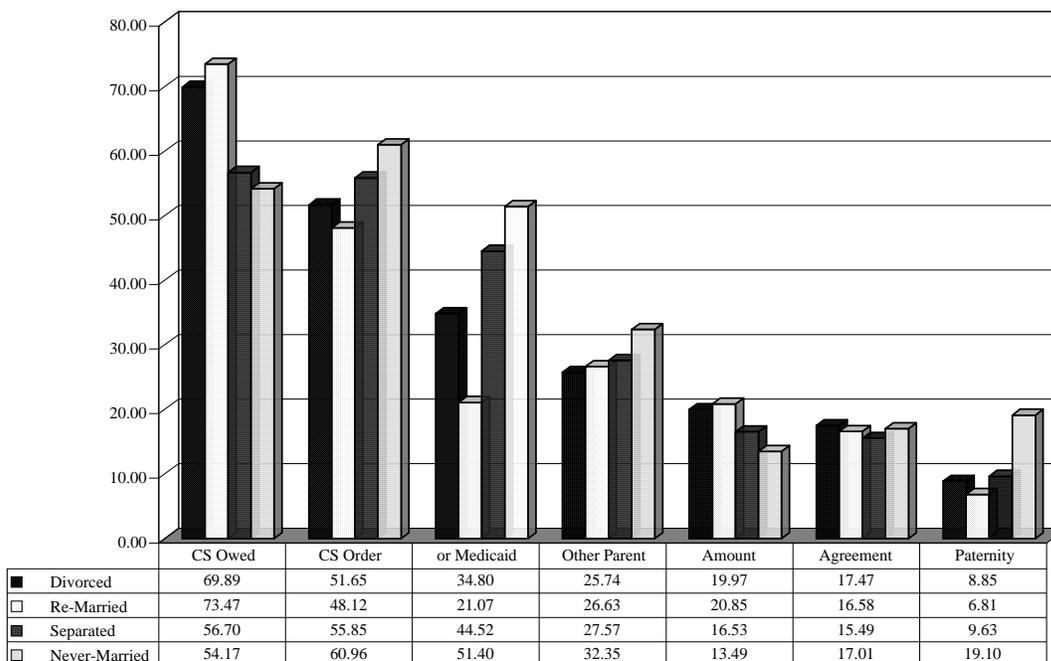


## Marital Status

Divorced and remarried mothers were most interested in help with collecting child support on an existing order (69 and 73 percent, respectively). They were next most interested in help with establishing an order (51 and 48 percent, respectively). Divorced mothers also had some interest in obtaining help with a TANF or Medicaid problem (35 percent). Never-married mothers were most interested in assistance with establishing child support (61 percent). They also wanted help collecting on an existing order (54 percent) or help with a TANF or Medicaid problem. Among mothers interested in help finding the other parent, never-married mothers were most likely to report asking for this kind of help by a slim margin (32 percent versus 28 percent for separated mothers; 27 percent for remarried mothers and 26 percent for divorced mothers). Although few mothers sought help establishing paternity, never-married mothers were twice as interested (19 percent versus less than 10 percent for other mothers).

Except in the enforcement and updating of orders, families where minorities are over-represented (e.g., unwed couples with children) do not seem to be less well-served by the OCSE agency. These key differences in establishing orders and locating the other parent between unwed and divorced parents point to a larger difference between them. There is no system for securing child support orders after a nonmarital birth that is analogous to the measures for securing orders available to divorced or separated parents.

Figure 17: Agency Help by Marital Status (94-02 Pooled)



Source: 1994-2002 CPS-CSS. Sample limited to mothers without cs order or agreement.

## **Summary**

Despite successful efforts by the child support enforcement system to increase paternity establishment and despite increases in child support awards to minority mothers, in the 1990–2002 period, minority mothers were still less likely to have received a child support order than their nonminority counterparts. African-American and Hispanic mothers were likely to say that they wanted child support, but African-American mothers were also likely to say that they did not believe that the noncustodial father could afford to pay. Hispanic mothers did not believe that the father provided all he could and were more likely to note that paternity had not been established. Asian American mothers were also likely to say that paternity had not been established when asked why they did not have a child support order. Native-American mothers were very likely to have contacted a child support or TANF agency for help in obtaining a child support order, but in the early 1990s, they were also likely to report that they had received no help in those efforts.

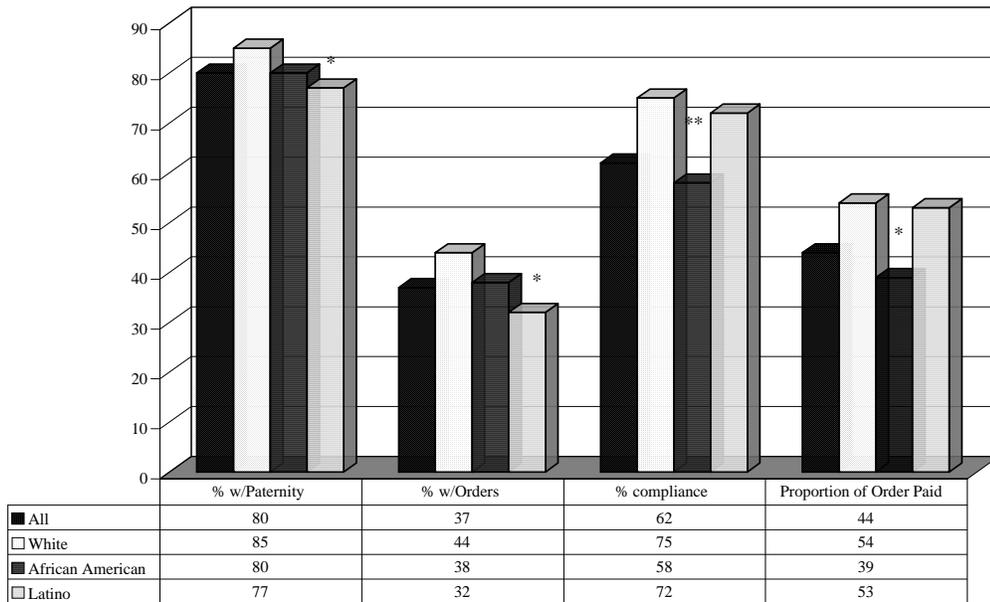
These child support outcome differences point to the larger problem: that there is not yet an adequate system for establishing orders for never-married couples that matches the measures in place for establishing orders for divorced and separated mothers. This causes either no orders or delayed orders for never-married mothers and contributes to the enforcement system's problems in locating noncustodial fathers.

# **Fragile Families Data**

## Section Four: Fragile Families Data<sup>10</sup>

In the previous section we asked *who* participated in the child support enforcement system at any given moment, and we found significant racial disparities independent of most socioeconomic and relationship status variables. In this section, we first ask *what* accounts for minority-nonminority discrepancies, then *how* those disparities evolve. This is the first study that succeeds in accounting for minority-nonminority differences in child support outcomes without resorting to simulations.

**Figure 18: Child Support Outcomes for Nonresident Parents at Third Year**



Source: FFCWS

Significance tests indicate statistically significant differences between whites and Hispanics and between Whites and blacks. \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001.

The study is based on a cohort of 1,985 mothers who had a nonmarital birth between April 1998 and August 2000<sup>11</sup> and did not consistently live with the father of their child at three interview points of the national Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study.<sup>12</sup> The original sample included 4,900 births (3,700 nonmarital and 1,200 to married parents). (See the appendix for the variables used and the data selection method.)

<sup>10</sup> As currently edited, figures 16-17 have been discarded and we have not re-numbered the remaining figures.

<sup>11</sup> The study conducted follow-up interviews at 12 and 36 months. A final interview at 60 months old is in the field. The national sample is taken from 16 of the 20 U.S. cities and is representative of all nonmarital births in the U.S. to parents residing in cities with populations over 200,000. The data also represent nonmarital births within each of the 20 sample cities (Baseline report Princeton).

<sup>12</sup> Most researchers hold that under current law, child support should not apply to cohabiting parents because the father is living with the children and is assumed to be giving support.

In the third-year sample, 80 percent of fathers had established paternity. Broken down racially, 85 percent of White fathers, 80 percent of Blacks and 77 percent of Hispanics had established paternity. The difference between Blacks and Whites was not significant; the difference between Hispanics and Whites was statistically significant.

Fewer custodial mothers in this urban sample (37 percent) had child support orders than mothers in the national sample (57 percent). By race, the results were: 44 percent of White custodial mothers, 38 percent of Black custodial mothers, and 32 percent of Hispanic custodial mothers had a child support order. The difference between White and Black parents was not significant. The difference between Hispanic and White parents was significant.

Interestingly, the fragile families urban compliance rate (62 percent) was higher than the national compliance rate (59 percent). By race, 74 percent of White mothers who had an order received a payment, as did 58 percent of Black mothers and 72 percent of Hispanic mothers. The difference between Whites and Blacks was significant. The White-Hispanic difference was not significant.

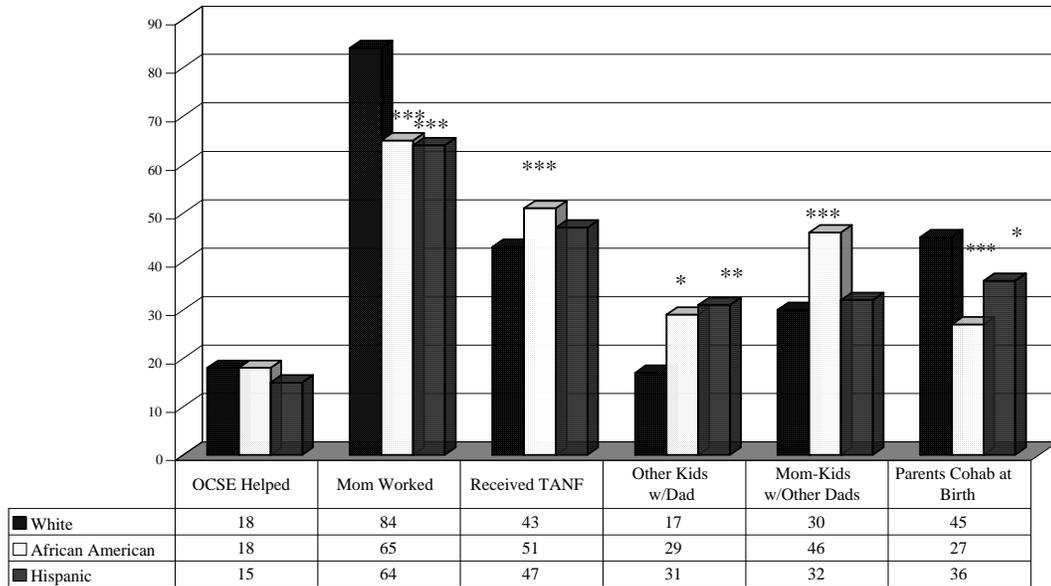
Finally, the degree of compliance among the urban sample (44 percent, typically) was about the same as for the national sample (45 percent). The White-Black difference was significant (54 percent for Whites and 39 percent for Blacks). The White-Hispanic difference was not significant (54 percent for Whites and 53 percent for Hispanics).

Even without taking demographic factors other than race into account, at year 3, urban Black nonresident parents are as likely to have established paternity and have child support orders as urban, White nonresident parents. Among Black and White urban mothers who had child support orders, there were significant differences in payment outcomes (for both compliance and degree of compliance). Urban Hispanic nonresident parents are significantly less likely to have paternity established and have a child support order than urban White nonresident parents, but there are no significant differences in payment outcomes among Hispanic and White mothers who had orders.

### **A. Background Demographics**

Within each racial group, less than a fifth of mothers asked for help from a child support enforcement agency, even though 40 to 50 percent of mothers in each racial group were involved in the welfare system and therefore required to cooperate with the child support enforcement system. There was little significant difference by race in OCSE contact.

**Figure 19: Key Mother Characteristics at Year Three**



Source: FFCWS  
 Significance tests indicate statistically significant differences between whites and Hispanics and between whites and African-Americans. \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001.

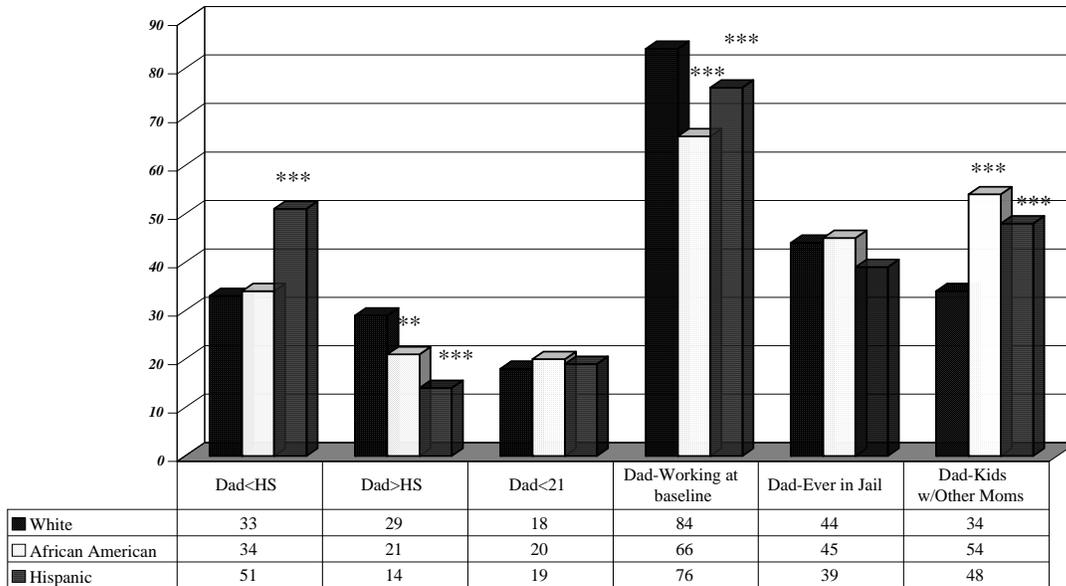
White mothers were significantly more likely to have worked (84 percent) than Black (65 percent) or Hispanic (64 percent) mothers. Black mothers (51 percent) were significantly more likely to have received TANF benefits than White (43 percent) or Hispanic (47 percent) mothers.

Minority mothers were more likely to have had other children with the father of the focal child (29 and 31 percent for Black and Hispanic mothers, 17 percent for White mothers).

Minorities were significantly less likely to have been cohabiting at the time of the focal child's birth. Forty-five percent of White mothers were living with the child's father when the child was born, as compared with 27 percent of Black and 36 percent of Hispanic mothers.

Black and Hispanic nonresident fathers had lower levels of education, with Hispanic fathers being much less likely to have completed high school than White fathers (34 percent versus 51 percent), and Black and Hispanic dads were less likely to have had an education beyond high school. Black and Hispanic fathers were less likely to have been working at the 3-year interview than White fathers (66 percent and 76 percent, compared with 84 percent). Surprisingly, from 39 to 45 percent of fathers had ever been incarcerated with no significant difference by race. Finally, minority dads were significantly more likely to have had a child or children with another woman.

**Figure 20: Key Father Characteristics at Year Three**



Source: FFCWS

Significance tests indicate statistically significant differences between whites and Hispanics and between whites and blacks. \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001.

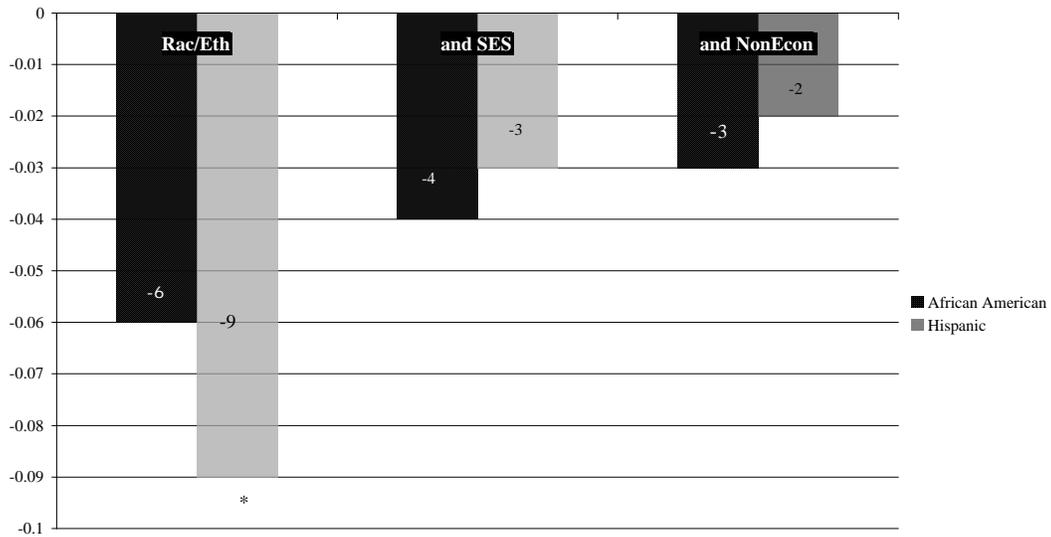
In the discussion below, we restate the raw difference between minority and White parents, then we examine the change in these differences as various characteristics are held constant. We add the socioeconomic characteristics of parents followed by noneconomic characteristics (including whether the mother received help from a child support agency). Tests of significance indicate whether the differences between Blacks and Whites and Hispanics and Whites, remain significant after economic and/or noneconomic characteristics are taken into account.

## **B. Paternity Establishment**

Black and Hispanic fathers are 6 and 9 percentage points, respectively, less likely than White fathers to have established paternity (Figure 21). The latter difference was significant. After adding the SES variables, the difference for Hispanic fathers dropped to 3 percentage points and was no longer significantly different from 0.

Fathers who had more education and did not have multiple partner fertility and mothers who reported very good health were more likely to establish paternity. Curiously, both mothers and fathers who reported having a drug or alcohol problem were more likely to have paternity established as well. In terms of noneconomic characteristics, parents who were romantically involved at birth were less likely to have established paternity than those who were cohabiting, as were mothers with multiple partner fertility. Mothers who wanted the father’s name on the birth certificate, and those who reported that the father contributed

**Figure 21: Differences between Minority and White Parents on the Probability of Establishing Paternity at Year Three**



Source: FFCWS Significance tests indicate statistically significant differences between whites and Hispanics and between Whites and blacks. \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001.

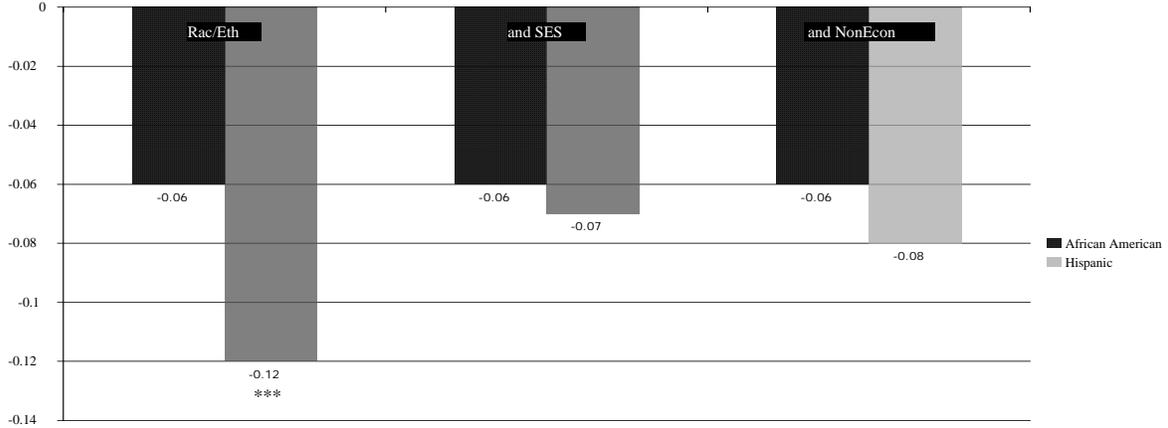
cash during the pregnancy and visited in the hospital were more likely to have paternity established for their children.

One of the strongest predictors of paternity establishment was whether the mother obtained help from a child support enforcement agency. Mothers who said yes to this question were 12 percentage points more likely to have paternity established.

### C. Child Support Orders

Black and Hispanic fathers were 6 and 12 percentage points, respectively, less likely to have an order than White fathers (Figure 22). The difference between Hispanic and White

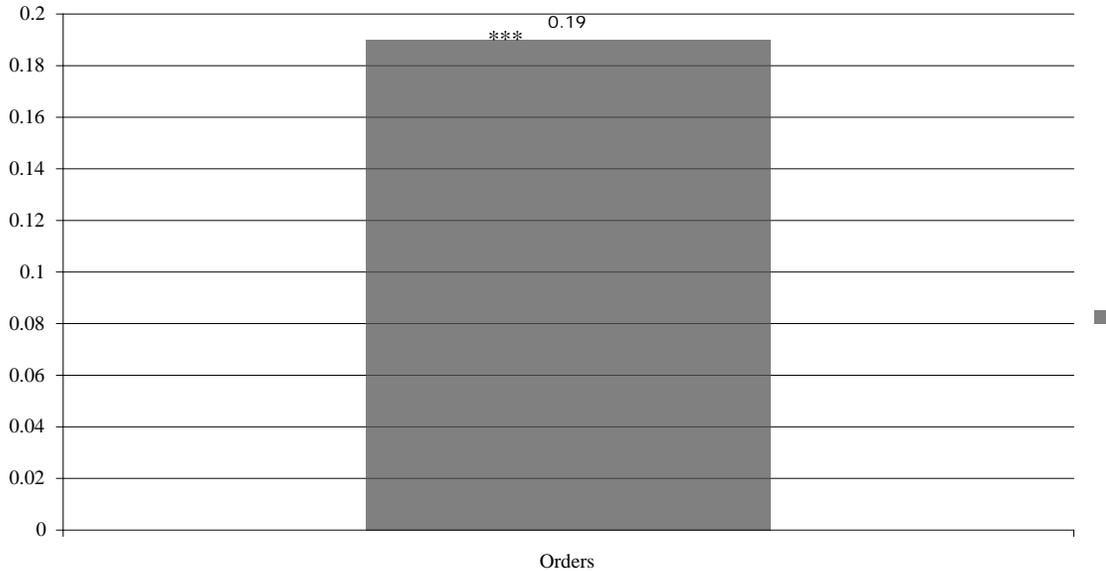
**Figure 22: Difference between Minority and White Parents on the Probability of Having a Child Support Order**



Source: FFCWS

Significance tests indicate statistically significant differences between whites and Hispanics and between whites and blacks. \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001.

**Figure 22a: Effect of OCSE Help on Child Support Outcomes**



Source: FFCWS

Significance tests indicate statistically significant differences between mothers with orders and payments and mothers without orders and payments. \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001

outcomes is significant. Taking socioeconomic variables into account changes little for Black-White differences, but doing so decreases the Hispanic-White difference to 7 percentage points and that difference is not statistically significant from 0. Adding noneconomic variables to the model does not change Black-White differences and

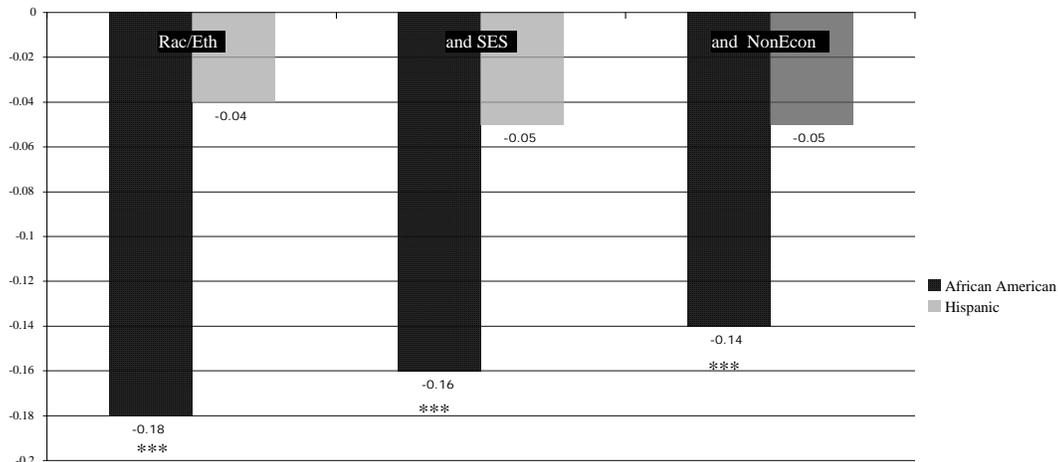
increases the Hispanic-White difference to 8 percentage points, and that difference is also not statistically significant.

As with paternity establishment, the strongest predictor of having an order was whether the mother received help from the child support agency. Mothers who did were 19 percentage points more likely to have an order (Figure 22a). Fathers who have more education and those who have children with other mothers are more likely to have an order (8 percentage points). Native-born mothers are much more likely to have a child support order (23 percentage points) than those born outside of the United States. Mothers who reported at the baseline survey that they wanted the father involved in raising the child were 15 percentage points more likely to have an order.

### D. Compliance

Black fathers were 18 percentage points less likely to comply with their child support obligation than White fathers, and this difference was significant (Figure 23). Hispanic fathers were only 4 percentage points less likely to comply (a difference that was not statistically different from 0). Black fathers were still significantly less likely to comply with a child support order after socioeconomic and nonsocioeconomic variables were added to the model. They were 16 points less likely to comply when SES variables were added and 14 points less likely when SES and non-SES variables were added.

**Figure 23: Difference between Minority and White Parents on the Probability of Compliance**



Significance tests indicate statistically significant differences between whites and Hispanics and between Whites and blacks. \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001.

Source: FFCWS

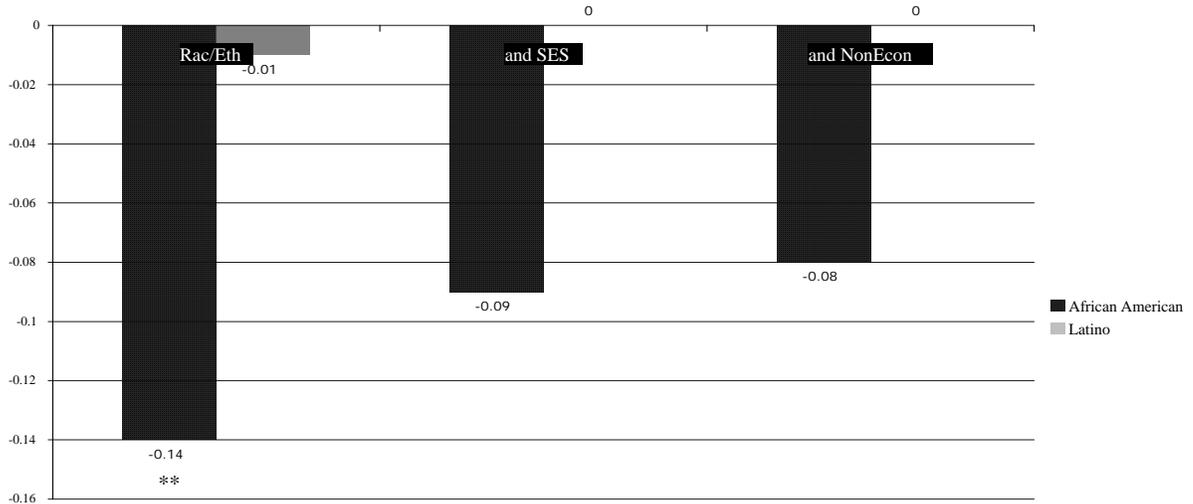
Employed fathers were 12 percentage points more likely to comply with a child support order. Fathers who had a history of incarceration were 12 percentage points less likely to comply. Fathers with a post-secondary education were 15 percentage points more likely to comply; and mothers who reported TANF receipt were less likely to have received a

payment if they had an order, indicating that these mothers are probably associated with fathers who are less able to pay support. Fathers who had visited the mother in the hospital were 18 percentage points more likely to comply. Whether the mother obtained help from the child support agency was not predictive of receiving payments from the father once an order was in place.

### E. Degree of Compliance

There is no difference between Hispanic and White fathers on the proportion of the child support paid (degree of compliance) (Figure 24). Significantly, Black fathers who pay child support orders pay 14 percent less on their orders than do White fathers. When socioeconomic variables are added to the model, the difference between Black and White fathers is reduced to 9 percent, a difference that is no longer statistically significant.

**Figure 24: Difference between Minority and White Parents on the Proportion of Order Paid (Degree of Compliance)**



Source: FFCWS

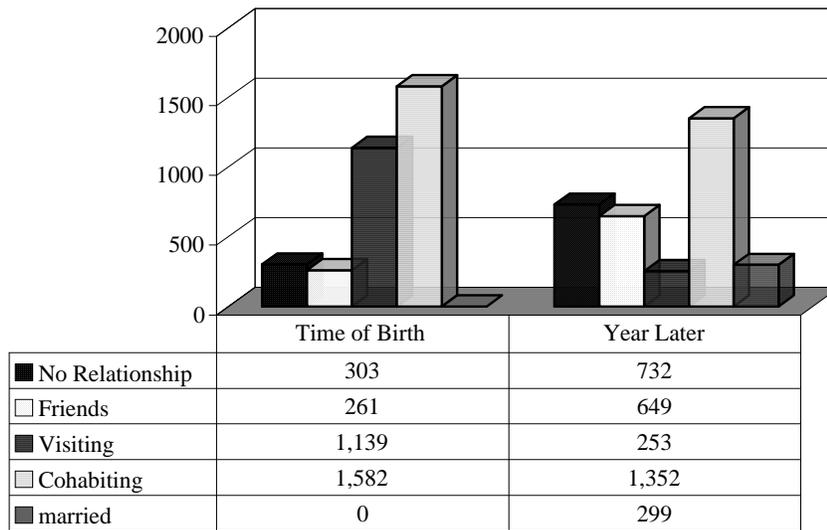
Significance tests indicate statistically significant differences between whites and Hispanics and between whites and blacks. \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001.

Fathers who were not working or had a history of incarceration paid a smaller portion of the ordered amount, while mothers who were on TANF and were not working received a smaller portion. Mothers who were born in the United States also received a smaller proportion of the child support due them, although they were much more likely to have an order. Fathers who were more supportive of the mother at birth and those who visited in the hospital paid a larger proportion of their order.

### F. The Special Role of Cohabitation

Because our sample mixes parents who never cohabited with parents who had ever cohabited in the three years after the child’s birth, we can also observe differences in child

**Figure 25: Relationships at Time of Birth and One Year Later**



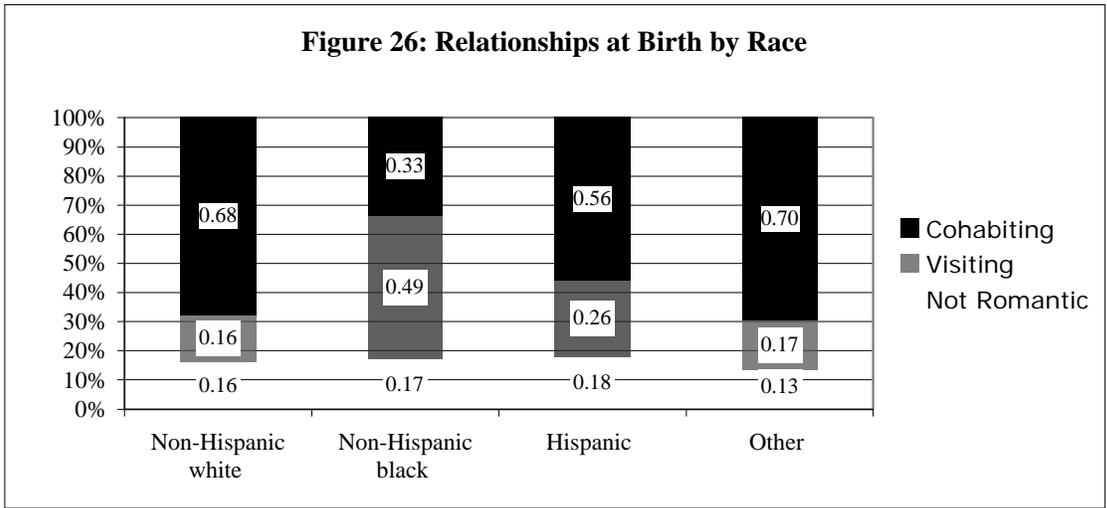
support outcomes between these groups (parents who never co-resided and parents who had ever lived together in the 3-year period under study).

To review briefly, cohabiting couples were the dominant group at baseline and at the year-one interview (Figure 25). At baseline almost two-thirds of White couples and more than half the Hispanic sample, but only a third of Blacks, cohabited.

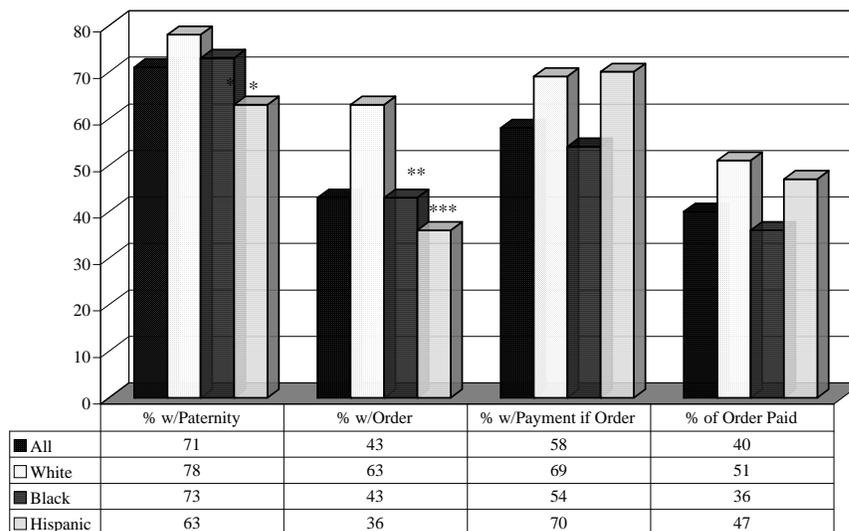
On the assumption that cohabiting couples are not part of the child support system, at baseline, only a minority of White, a majority of Black, and almost half the Hispanic mothers were eligible for child support. Thus, the cohabiting parents who stopped cohabiting and became eligible for child support by the third-year interview were disproportionately drawn from the ranks of White and Hispanic parents. Because cohabiting parents have higher socioeconomic outcomes, parents who previously cohabited and then entered the child support universe were also likely to be better-off than parents who never cohabited.

Among parents who had never cohabited by the third-year interview, significantly fewer Hispanic parents had established paternity. The disparity in paternity establishment rates for Black and White fathers who never cohabited was not statistically significant. Almost two-thirds of White parents who never cohabited had child support orders. This is a striking result in that only 44 percent of White parents in the total never-resident sample had a child support order at year 3.

Fifty-eight percent of never-cohabiting parents had made payments on their child support orders, paying an average of only 40 percent of their obligation. There are no statistically significant disparities between minority and White fathers on either compliance measure.

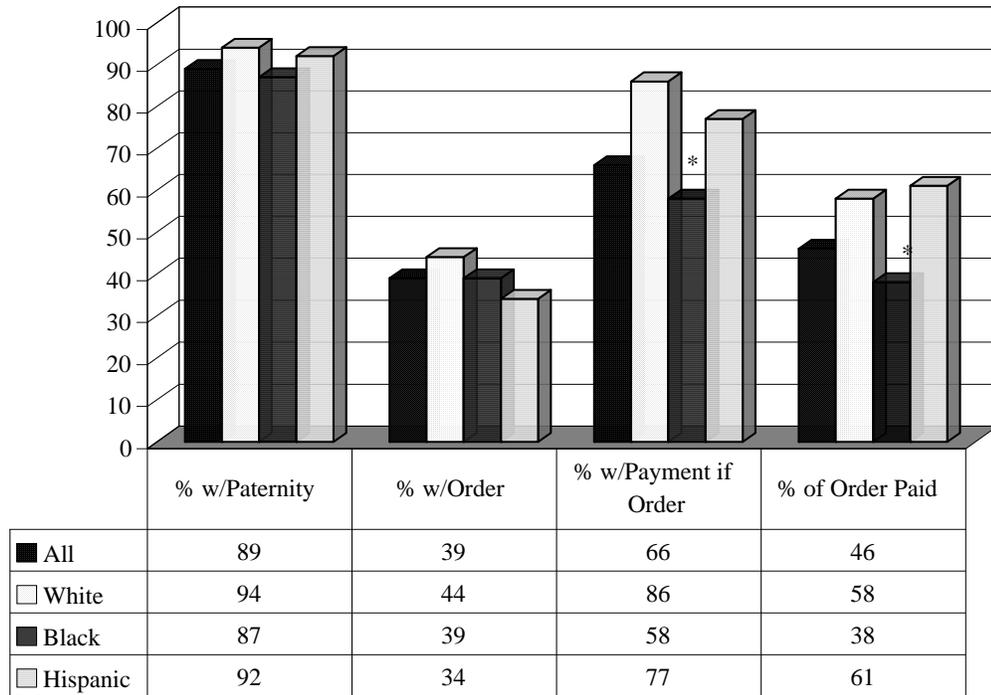


**Figure 27: Child Support Outcomes for Parents who Never Cohabited by Year Three of Fragile Family**



Significance tests indicate statistically significant differences between whites and Hispanics and whites and blacks.  
 \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001

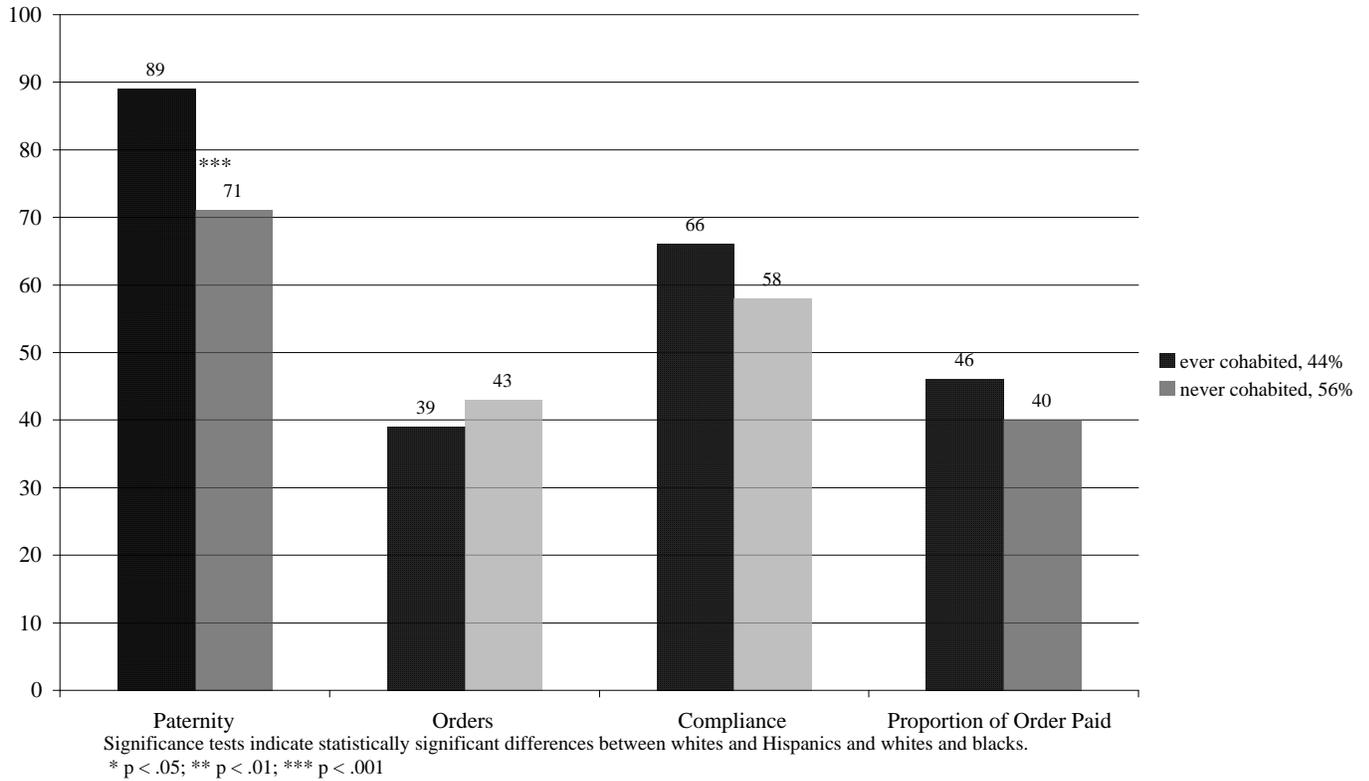
**Figure 28: Child Support Outcomes for Parents who Ever Cohabited by Year Three Interview**



Significance tests indicate statistically significant differences between whites and Hispanics and whites and blacks. \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001

Among ever-cohabiting parents, almost 90 percent had established paternity by year 3 with no significant differences by race (94 percent for White parents, 87 percent for Black parents, and 92 percent for Hispanic parents). Fewer than 43 percent had child support orders. Specifically, 44 percent of White ever-cohabiting parents had orders, with significant differences by race. Two-thirds of fathers who had ever cohabited made payments on their child support orders, paying an average of 46 percent of their obligation. There was no statistically significant disparity between Black and White ever-cohabiting fathers on both compliance measures.

**Figure 29 : Child Support Outcomes for Never versus Ever Resident Fathers at the Three Year Survey**



In summary, there are some differences between never-cohabiting and ever-cohabiting parents, but most of them are not significant. There were significant paternity establishment differences with fewer never-cohabiting fathers establishing paternity than their ever-cohabiting peers (71 percent versus 90 percent). A higher percent (43 percent) of never-cohabiting parents had child support orders than parents who had ever cohabited (39 percent), but this difference was not significant. Fathers who had ever cohabited were more likely to comply with their child support order, if they had one, than never-cohabiting fathers (66 percent versus 58 percent), but the difference was not significant. Ever-cohabiting fathers paid an average of 46 percent of their order, versus 40 percent for never-cohabiting fathers. Again, the differences were not significant.

# **New York City Social Indicators Survey**

## Section Five: New York City Social Indicators Survey

The third study is based on a sample of New York City mothers who reported that their child(ren) had a nonresident father. The sample was intended to help monitor the implementation and impact of welfare reform in New York. This first wave, in 1997, of the “New York City Social Indicators Survey” interviewed 339 mothers from whom a subsample of mothers actually on welfare was drawn. In this report, we use the total sample, not the welfare subsample, and the child support outcomes in the larger sample between Whites and minorities are greater (see Figure 34) than those reported in either the CPS-CSS or the Fragile Families surveys. Given these wide White-minority gaps, this third study provides a particularly robust confirmation of results we obtained in earlier sections of this report. The New York City Social Indicators Survey also pays a great deal of attention to differences between U.S.-born and foreign-born Blacks (from Haiti, Jamaica, etc.) and Hispanics (from the Dominican Republic, Cuba, etc.).<sup>13</sup> When we observed child support enforcement differences between U.S.-born and foreign-born mothers in the Fragile Families data set with demographic and socioeconomic variables controlled, U.S.-born mothers had significantly better outcomes for child support orders. In the “New York City Social Indicators” dataset, foreign-born mothers had superior outcomes in most cases. In our recommendations section, we suggest follow-up work that exploits capacities within Fragile Families dataset for analysis of Hispanic subcommunities.

Of the noneconomic (attitude) variables included in our models, several seem to predict child support outcomes and could be a focus of intervention.

- Mothers who think that financial reasons are important for having an order are more likely to have a child support order.
- Mothers who are aware of the child support enforcement agency also are more likely to have an order.
- In bivariate associations two noneconomic (attitude) variables were significantly higher for Hispanics and may be the foci of interventions for this group.
- Hispanics are more likely to say that safety (violence) issues are a reason for not having an order.
- Hispanics are more likely to say that the process of getting a child support order is too difficult (this may indicate a language or cultural barrier).

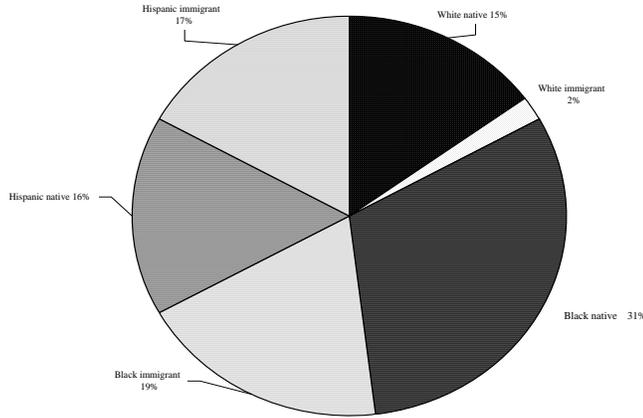
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<sup>13</sup> We grouped Puerto Rican respondents in both U.S.-born and foreign-born categories and obtained no significant differences in our results. For this final analysis, we grouped Puerto Rican subjects as U.S.-born.

## A. Description of the Sample

The sample was heavily minority with only 17 percent of the mothers White. A third were nonimmigrant Blacks, which rose to half when Black immigrants were included. A third were Hispanic, about equally divided between those of immigrant and nonimmigrant status.

Figure 30: Mothers with Non-resident Fathers in the New York City Social Indicators Survey by Race/Ethnicity and Nativity (N=331)

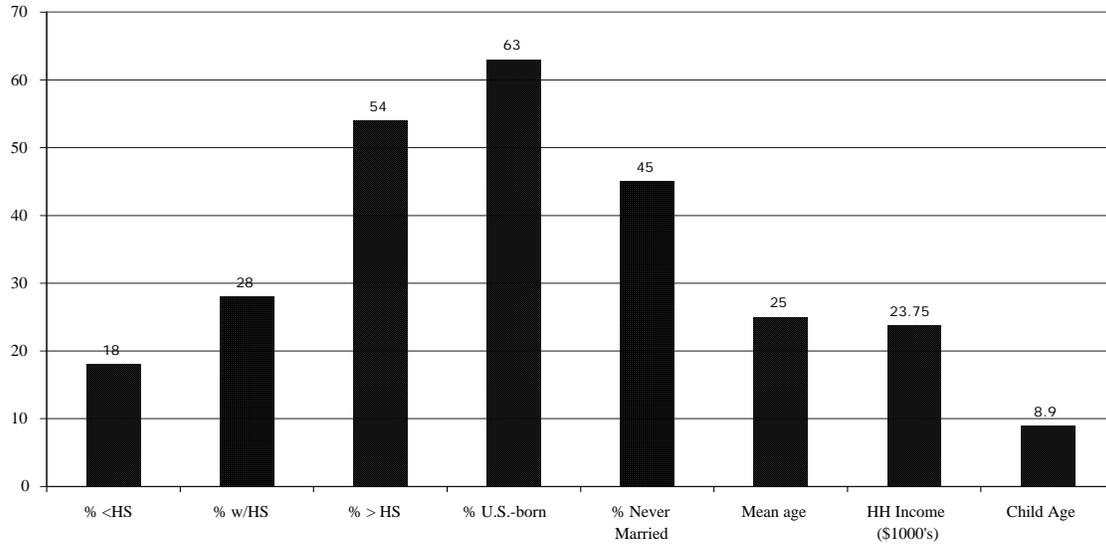


## Noneconomic Variables

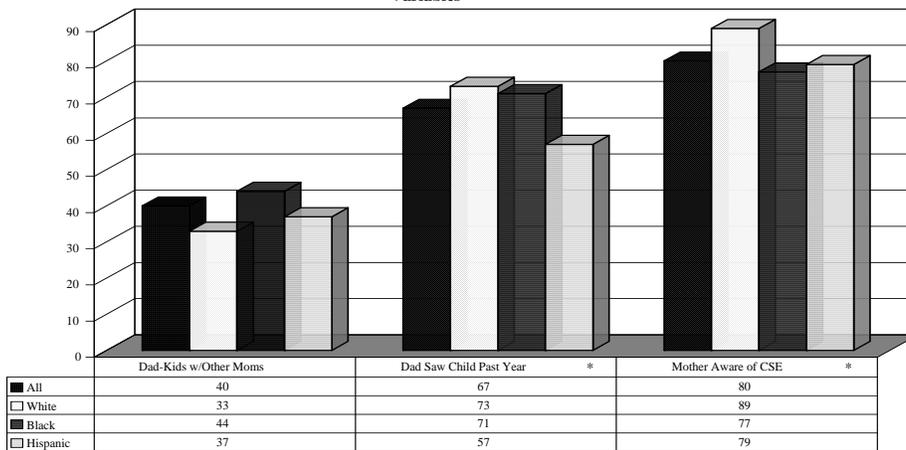
The sample was relatively highly educated, and 54 percent had more than a high-school education. Almost half (45 percent) had never married, and the mean child age was almost 9. The average mother was 25 years old, and the average household income was \$24,000.

A third of White fathers, 44 percent of African-American fathers, and slightly more than a third (37 percent) of Hispanic fathers had other children with a different mother. Fathers associated with Hispanic mothers were more likely to not have seen their child in the past year. Most mothers were aware of the child support enforcement agency, but White mothers in particular (90 percent) knew of the agency.

**Figure 31: Other Attributes of Mothers - New York City Social Indicators Survey 1997**

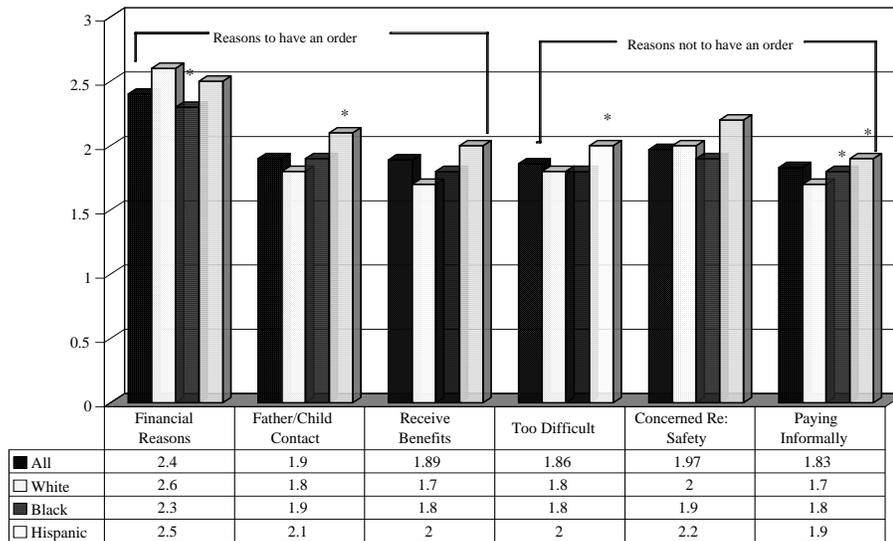


**Figure 32: New York City Social Indicators Survey's Noneconomic Variables**



\* Differences by race/ethnicity are statistically significant at the 10% level

**Figure 33: Reasons Mothers Do and Do not Have Orders (3=very important)**

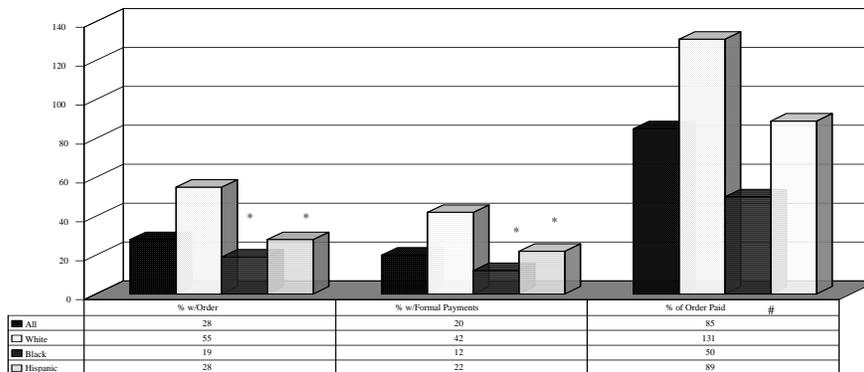


\* Differences between Black and white or between Hispanic and white are statistically significant at the 10% level

### Attitudes toward Child Support

Although most mothers said it was important to have a child support order for financial reasons, White and Hispanic mothers gave it more importance than African-American mothers. Hispanic mothers felt that the order enhanced father/child contact more than other mothers and Hispanic mothers were also more likely to feel that getting the order is a difficult process. They also felt that being concerned about safety was a good reason not to get the order. African-American and Hispanic mothers were more likely to feel that whether a father pays informally is a good reason not to have an order.

**Figure 34: Child Support Outcomes from the New York City Social Indicators Survey**



\* Differences between Black and white or between Hispanic and white are statistically significant at the 10% level  
# Sample is too small to detect significant effects by race, (N=63)

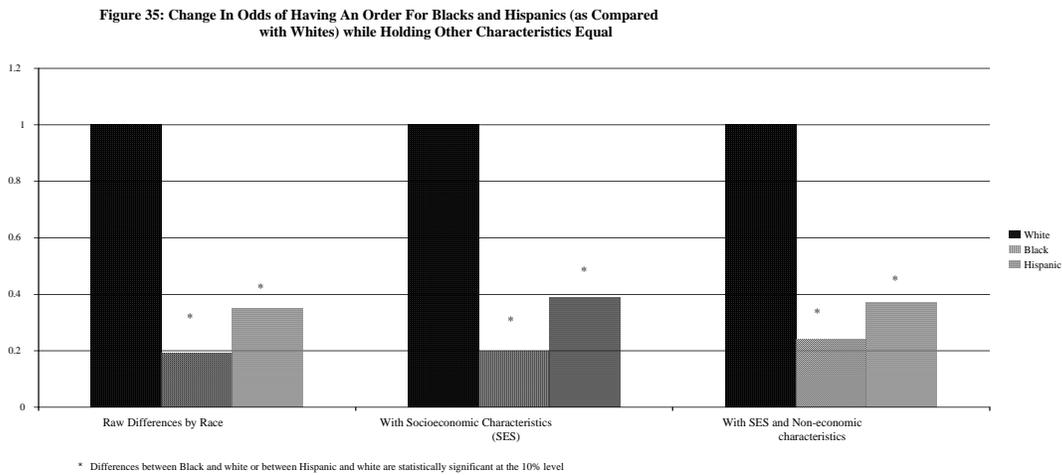
## B. Child Support Outcomes

Fifty-five percent of White mothers had orders (a rate that was twice that of Hispanic mothers). White mothers were also four times more likely than African-American mothers to have received a formal payment from the father. Only 18 percent of all mothers received a child support payment (whether they had an order or not).

- White mothers are much more likely to have an order than are African-American or Hispanic mothers.
- White mothers are much more likely to have a payment.
- White mothers receive much more support than African-American or Hispanic mothers.

Among the small group of mothers (67 mothers) who had child support orders, compliance was quite high (about 80 percent) in terms of the share of mothers who received a payment and for the proportion of the obligation paid. On the first measure, the difference between White and African-American mothers (90 percent versus 67 percent) is only marginally significant at the 10-percent level. There is no significant difference between the Hispanic and White outcome.

The biggest differences between White and minority families lay in the proportion of mothers with orders, not in compliance with orders. Somewhat more surprisingly, African-American mothers have worse child support outcomes than Hispanic mothers, although Hispanic mothers appear to be more disadvantaged.



### Multivariate Analysis for Having an Order:

Adding demographics and noneconomic variables does little to reduce the difference in the likelihood of having an order by race and ethnicity.

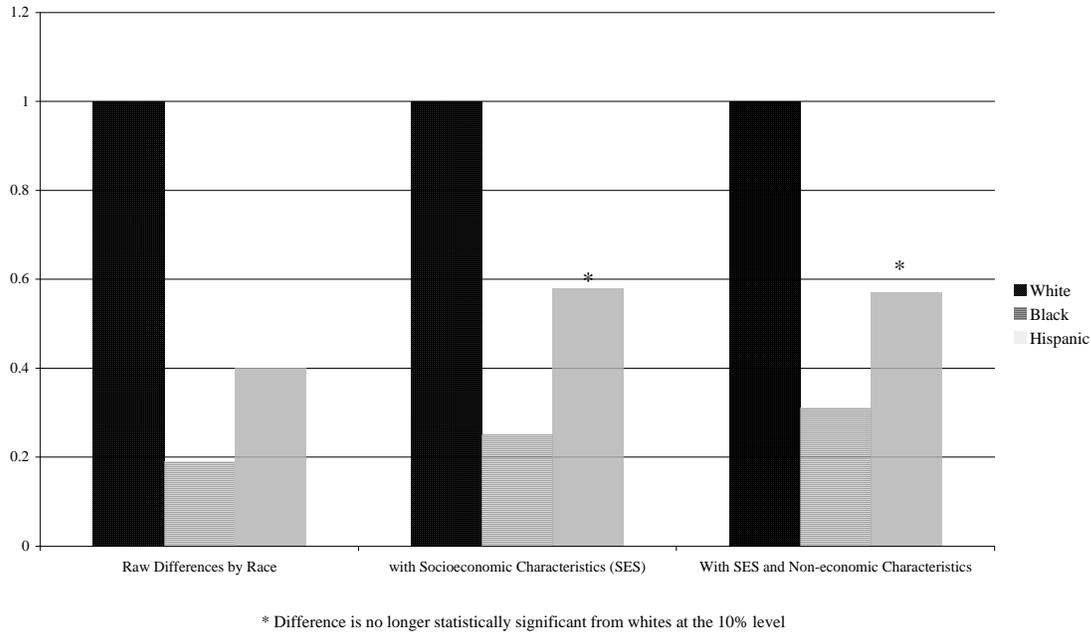
- Blacks are 75 percent, and Hispanics 63 percent, less likely to have an order than Whites, controlling for all variables.
- All differences remain statistically significant.

**Multivariate Analysis for Receiving a Payment:**

- When demographics and noneconomic variables are added to the model, Hispanics are no longer significantly different from Whites in their likelihood of receiving a payment.
- Blacks continue to be about 70 percent less likely than Whites to receive a payment when controlling for all variables.

In examining the likelihood that a mother received child support payments, both the Hispanic and African-American coefficients increased, indicating that Hispanics are only 57 percent less likely, and African-American 73 percent less likely, than Whites to have a payment. More important, the difference between Hispanics and Whites was no longer statistically significant.

**Figure 36: Change in Odds of a Payment for Blacks and Hispanics as Compared to Whites while Holding Other Characteristics Equal**



**Multivariate Analysis for Amount of Payment:**

When demographics and noneconomic variables are added to the model, Hispanics are no longer significantly different from Whites on the amount of payment received.

- When adding noneconomic variables to the model, the difference between Blacks and Whites on amount of support received is reduced by a quarter.

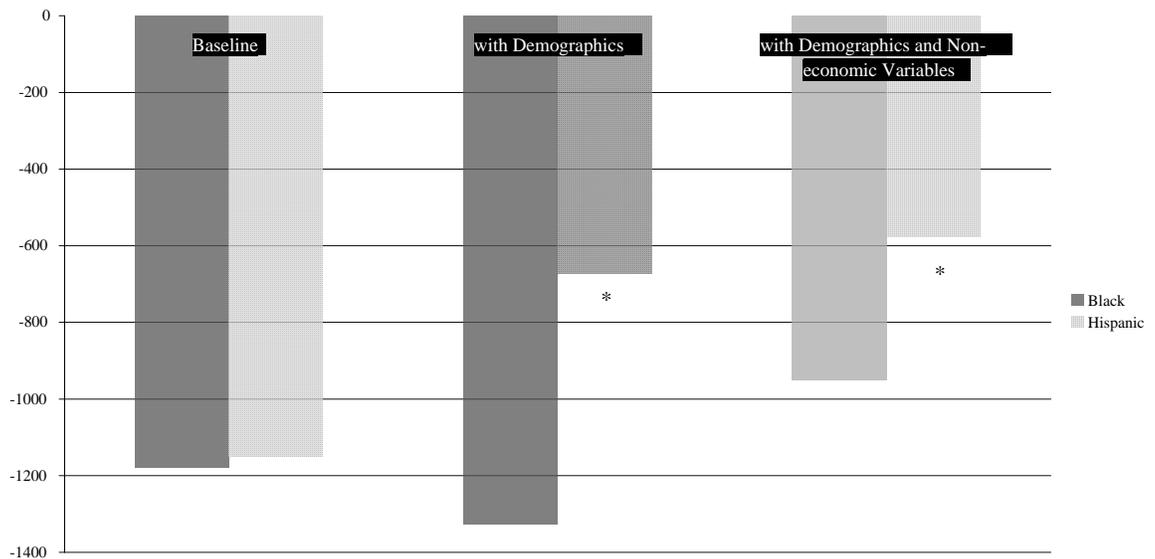
- African-Americans continue to receive about \$900 less than Whites, even when controlling for all variables.

**Noneconomic Variables:**

Mothers who believe that having an order is important for financial reasons are more than twice as likely to have an order and three times as likely to receive a formal payment. They receive \$800 more per year than those who do not believe this.

- Mothers who are aware of the CSE agency are over twice as likely to have an order as those who are not aware.

**Figure 37: Change in Amount of Payment Received for Blacks and Hispanics as Compared to Whites when Adding Controls**



\* Difference is no longer statistically significant from whites at the 10% level

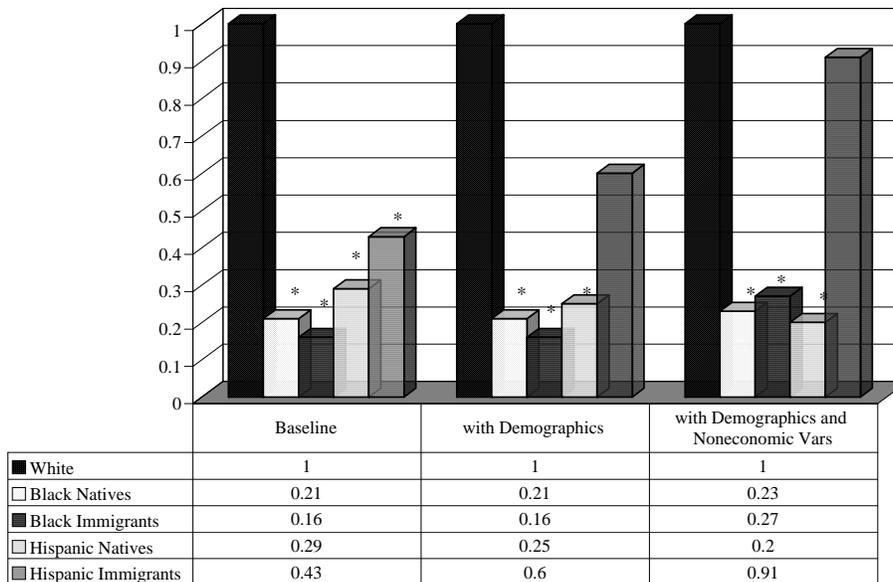
### C. Race by Immigrant Status

Although it appears that U.S.-born single mothers in New York City have better child support outcomes than foreign-born mothers, most differences within racial groups are not statistically significant. The difference between native and foreign-born mothers in the likelihood of having a formal payment is statistically significant, but only at the 10 percent level.

#### Multivariate Analysis of Having an Order by Race/Immigrant Status:

When adding demographic and noneconomic variables to the models, Hispanic immigrants are no longer significantly different from Whites on the likelihood of having an order. After socio- and noneconomic variables are added, Blacks, Black immigrants and Hispanics remain significantly different in the likelihood of having an order.

**Figure 38: Change in Odds of Having an Order for Minorities by Immigrant Status compared with Whites while Holding Other Characteristics Equal**

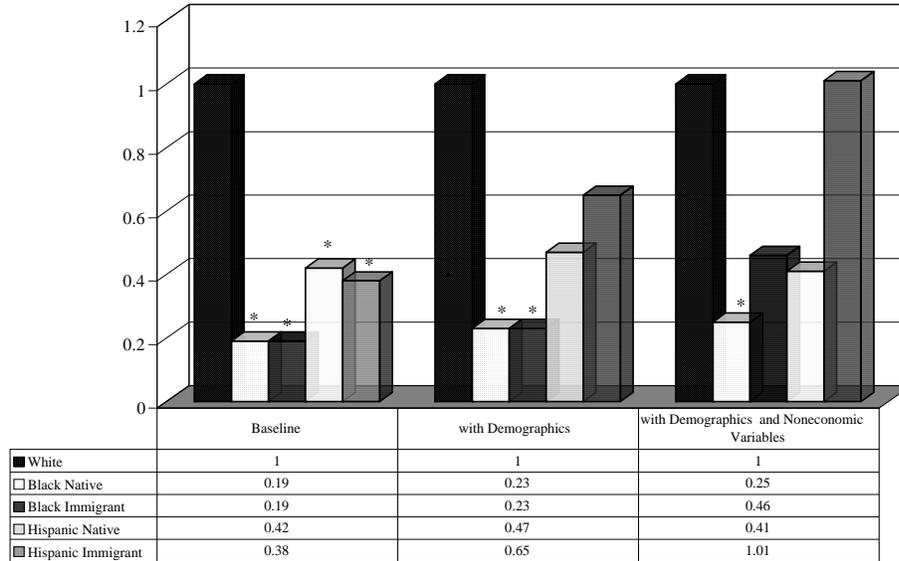


\* Differences between minority and white mothers are statistically significant at the 10% level

### Multivariate Analysis of Receiving a Payment by Race/Immigrant Status:

After adding demographic and noneconomic variables, Hispanic natives and immigrants are no longer significantly different from Whites in the likelihood of receiving a payment.

**Figure 39: Change in Odds of Having a Payment for Minorities by Immigrant Status as Compared to Whites While Holding Other Characteristics Equal**



\* Differences between minority and white mothers are statistically significant at the 10% level

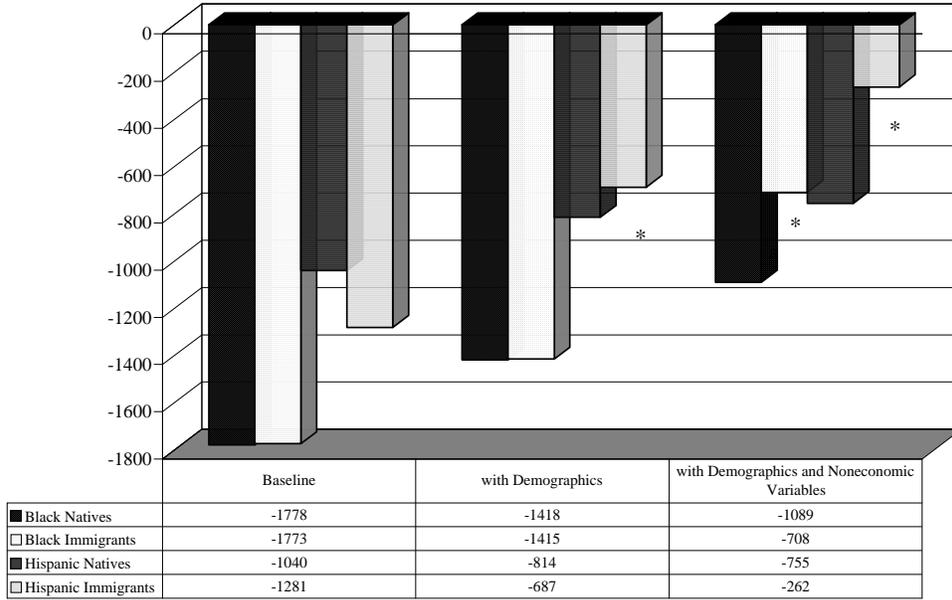
Black immigrants also are no longer significantly different from Whites when noneconomic variables are added to the model.

### Multivariate Analysis of Amount of Payment by Race/Immigrant Status:

After adding demographic and noneconomic variables, Hispanic immigrants are no longer significantly different from Whites. After adding demographic variables, Black immigrants are no longer significantly different from Whites.

- When all covariates are added to models, Black natives continue to receive \$1,000 less in formal payments than do Whites.

**Figure 40: Change in Amount of Payment Received for Minorities by Immigrant Status as Compared to Whites When Adding Controls**

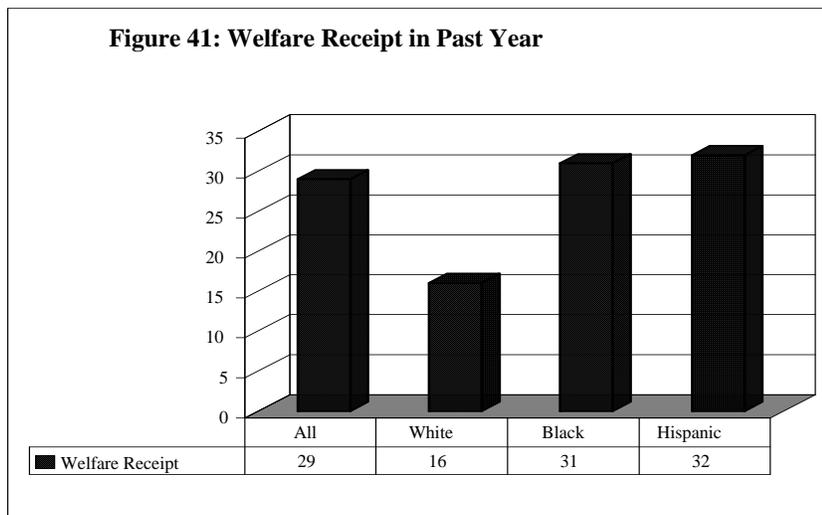


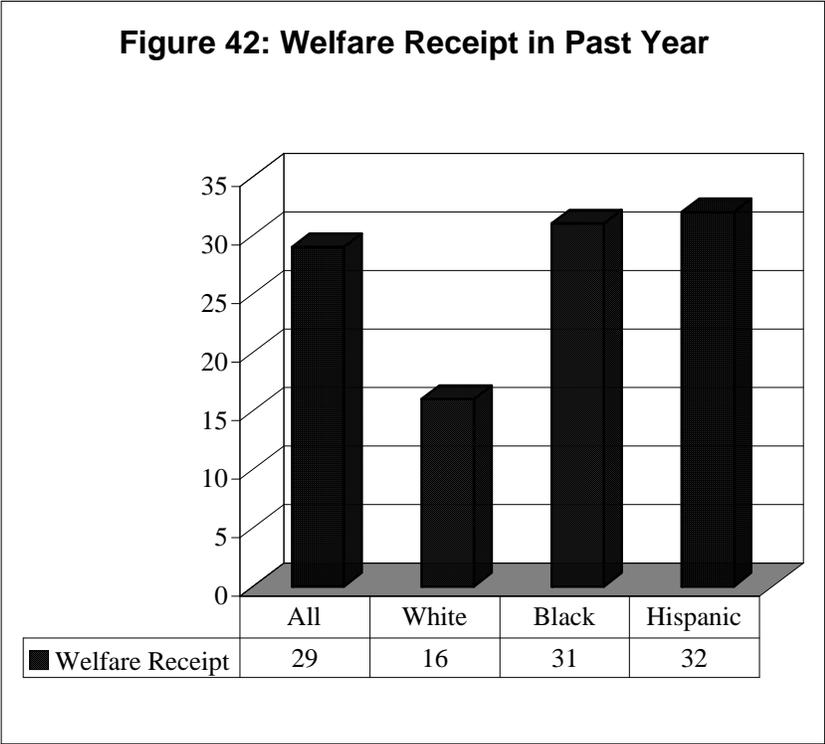
\* Difference is no longer statistically significant from Whites at the 10% level

**Welfare:**

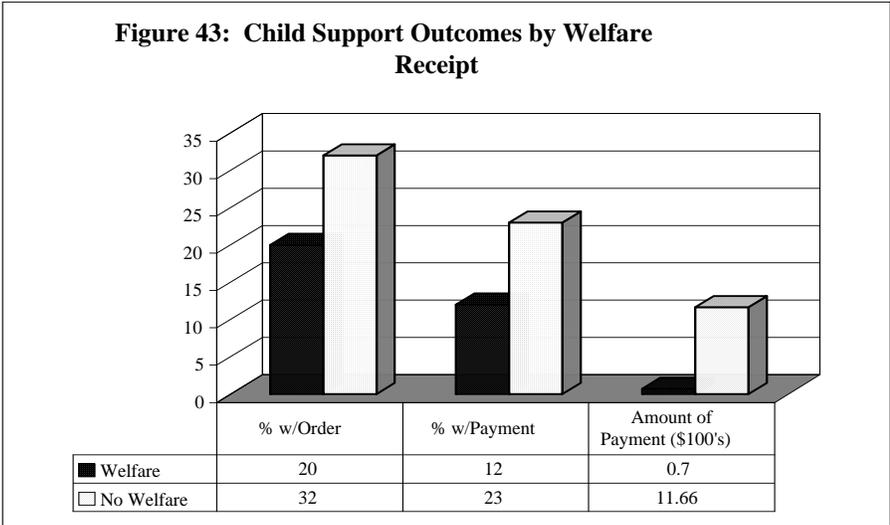
Blacks and Hispanics are twice as likely to have received welfare in the past year than are Whites. Those on welfare are much less likely to have an order and to receive a payment and receive much less in payments.

- However, after adding welfare receipt in past year to models, this variable does not affect the difference in child support outcomes among Blacks, Whites and Hispanics.





Given larger baseline differences between White and minority mothers, the study's main results are as follows: this study confirms the race gaps in child support orders found in the CPS-CSS and the Hispanic-White gap in the Fragile Families sample. Unlike results from the Fragile Families study, when economic and noneconomic variables available in the data set are taken into account, differences in child support orders between minorities and nonminorities remain.



The study does confirm the Fragile Families child support compliance findings. In this sample, economic variables must be introduced to account for differences in Hispanic-White compliance rates. No control variables can account for differences in Black-White compliance rates.

The present study confirms findings in both the CPS-CSS and Fragile Families research that custodial mothers benefit from contact with OCSE and TANF agencies for child support.

When parents' socioeconomic characteristics were held constant, the model accounted for differences between Hispanics and Whites in the proportion of mothers with child support payments. However, differences between Blacks and Whites on this outcome remained.

The study also confirmed a strong association between a mother's awareness of the child support agency and her chances of having an order.

The mother's perception that "getting financial support from the father is an important reason to have an order" strongly predicts her likelihood of having both an order and payments.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

## Section Six: Conclusions and Recommendations

We assumed that this array of studies would yield results similar to those of late 1980s welfare studies summarized by Bane and Ellwood that pinpointed differences in long-term versus short-term welfare spells and long-term versus short-term welfare populations. In a cross-sectional perspective, welfare studies emphasized the presence and attributes of those who remain on welfare for long periods. In a time-series or dynamic perspective, welfare studies emphasized the presence and attributes of welfare short-terms and cyclers (those who move on and off the rolls frequently). Picking one's perspective (selecting static versus dynamic views) gave an entirely different impression of welfare recipients and their attributes, especially race. The static perspective emphasized mothers who faced many barriers to the job market and were disproportionately minorities. The dynamic perspective highlighted mothers who were disproportionately likely to be divorced mothers with relatively few barriers to employment and not minorities. Bane and Ellwood then imagined policy reforms that included more robust child support enforcement, a time-limited welfare system for the short term, and new policies for the long term.

We assumed that we, too, would see differences in results between our cross-sectional (CPS-CSS, NYCSIS) and time series birth cohort (Fragile Families) studies, and we do. The former studies cannot fully account for racial disparities, whereas the latter study can account for racial differences in paternity establishment, child support orders and degree of compliance. The Fragile Families study did account for compliance differences between Hispanics and Whites, but could not account for compliance differences between Blacks and Whites.

Most researchers and policymakers have long assumed that the current child support enforcement system hosts two strikingly different populations within a single policy framework. This study demonstrates this dynamic. White and minority parents who live in large cities, who never married, and are child support eligible behave similarly within the child support enforcement system. These same parents behave in strikingly dissimilar ways from their suburban and rural, ever-married or cohabiting counterparts. The current child support enforcement system works best for children from ever-married and cohabiting couples and works least well for children from never-married, noncohabiting couples.

We exploited important differences between the CPS-CSS and Fragile Families data sets. The FFCWB survey includes information on never-married parents both before and after they were eligible for the child support system. The CPS-CSS facilitates comparisons between ever-married and never-married parents. The results indicate that the child support process is most responsive to divorced parents and least responsive to never-married parents. We imagine that this is because the marital dissolution process usually builds in a formal discussion about child support. Nonmarital parenting is a process that simultaneously and informally hosts both family formation and family dissolution conversations. That creates a chaotic context for child support enforcement. African-

American mothers who did not have child support orders, for example, were likely to say that they did not have orders because the father could not afford to pay, that he paid what he could and they did not want legal involvement. Policies like the Healthy Marriage Initiative are a useful response to these findings if efforts to increase marriage rates among never-married parents include child support education components as well.

Specifically this study determined the following:

#### African-Americans

- The difference in paternity establishment rates between urban, never-married, non-cohabiting Blacks (80 percent) and a similar group of Whites (85 percent) was not statistically significant.
- Similarly, the racial difference in child support orders was not statistically significant from zero.
- The Black-White compliance difference was 18 percentage points, and that difference remained large and significant with both socioeconomic and noneconomic controls.
- Black-White differences in degree of compliance were not statistically significant after controls were introduced.

#### Non-White Hispanics

- The difference in paternity establishment rates between urban never-married, non-cohabiting Hispanics (non-White) and Whites was not statistically significant after controls were applied.
- The difference in child support orders between White and Hispanic mothers was statistically significant, but after controls were applied, the difference was no longer significant.
- There was little difference among urban Whites and Hispanics in their compliance rates, and this difference was not significant.
- Similarly, the amount urban Hispanic fathers pay toward the amount due was comparable to the rate White fathers paid.

## **Recommendations:**

### Policy:

OCSE has taken steps to secure orders and improve compliance with respect to minorities. Further steps should be made to accelerate establishment of orders for all minority groups, and these include:

- Efforts to improve marriage rates for never-married parents and establish close paternal connections through marriage education and/or access and visitation should be taken. These may encourage better compliance over time.
- All minority groups need assistance to improve income stability of fathers as controls for economic factors did make a difference. Such programs hold little promise unless they include more intensive, better managed, and more effective employment services. Also, given the effects of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) on employment gains of less educated women, work supports and incentives targeting less-educated men may also be helpful. These could come in the form of earnings supplements, conditional on child support compliance, and increases in the child support pass-through.
- Compliance in terms of percent of orders paid is especially problematic to African Americans and Hispanics (Native Americans were not measured) and may mean that orders are too high for these low-wage earners due to imputed income to minimum orders as indicated by other studies.
- Efforts to maintain in-hospital paternity programs are critical.
- Child support efforts to establish orders for more of those with paternity established is critical.
- Efforts to increase orders among Hispanic fathers and compliance among Black fathers will have to become more nuanced. Reducing cultural barriers that may discourage Hispanic (or foreign-born) mothers from utilizing child support services may be key to the first objective.

### Research:

- Extend this analysis to the fifth wave of the “Fragile Family Survey” and decompose Hispanic outcomes by subcommunities.
- Update the CPS–CSS results and apply birth cohort simulations that replicate the Fragile Family study and demonstrate whether Fragile Family results can be obtained from a national sample.
- Resolve differences between the “Fragile Families” and “New York Social Indicators Survey” by authorizing a follow-up study to take advantage of the Fragile Family data set’s capacity to decompose Hispanic populations and evaluate them by region and subgroup.

# **Appendix A: Data Background**

## Appendix A: Data Background

Each of the three independent studies contained in this report contributes a unique perspective on race and ethnic differences in child support outcomes. The first is the CPS-CSS. This study combined five surveys from 1990 to 2002 for a pooled sample of 19,927 child support-eligible mothers, e.g., divorced, separated, never-married or remarried. The second study, based upon the first three years of the “Fragile Families Child Wellbeing Survey” (FFSCW), is a representative sample of nonmarital births that identifies children at birth and follows them forward, so that researchers can identify the timing of differences in child support outcomes. The third study observes 336 child support-eligible mothers from a larger random-sample 1997 “New York City Social Indicators Survey” (NYC SIS) designed to study the impact of welfare reform. It over-sampled low-income mothers and included a significant immigrant population.

Characteristics	Comparative Characteristics of the Three Samples		
	CPS-CSS	FFSCW – Wave 3	NYC SIS
Locale	Representative national sample	Representative urban sample (22 cities)	Urban – New York City only
Sample type	Five biannual cross-sectional samples (pooled)	Random birth cohort - interviewed at baseline, year one, year three and year five (not available)	Random cross-sectional sample – Wave 1 only
Time	1990–2002	1999–2000, 2000–1, 2002–3, 2004–5 (not available)	1997
Sample size	19,927	1,985	336 child support-eligible mothers
Marital status	Divorced, separated, never-married and remarried	Nonmarital sample only (cohabiting versus never co-resident)	Divorced, separated, never-married and remarried

## **Appendix B: Note on the Fragile Families Sample**

## Appendix B: Note on the Fragile Families Sample

The economic variables included: father's age, his incarceration history, his level of education, his multiple-partner fertility characteristics, his employment and disability status, and whether he had an alcohol or drug problem that affected employment. Also included were the mother's welfare participation, her employment and health status, and her nativity.

The noneconomic variables included: three measures of homogamy (whether parents are the same minority status and the difference in their education and ages), parents' relationship status at the time of the birth, how supportive the father was of the mother before the birth, the number of years they knew each other before the pregnancy, whether the mother wanted him involved in raising the child and several measures of father involvement prior to or at the time of the birth (whether he visited in the hospital, whether he contributed cash or in-kind during the pregnancy, and whether he intended to support the child in the future).

We also include whether the mother has other children with the current father or children with other fathers, whether she had a problem with drugs or alcohol, the gender of the child, and whether the mother received help from a child support agency. Although, mother's involvement with drugs or alcohol may be related to her need for child support, we include it as another measure of the father's willingness to pay, since in this case, the father cannot be sure that his payments are being spent on his child.

Finally, we include three aggregate measures of the local economic climate and legal environment: two city-level indicators (metropolitan area unemployment rate and a child support effectiveness index) and one State-level indicator (maximum TANF benefit).

Because this is a study of child support outcomes, we included only mothers eligible for child support. Specifically, we excluded the 1,200 marital births and restricted the data set to mothers with a nonmarital birth who were interviewed at all three waves (birth, 1-year and 3-year), and were associated with fathers whose racial/ethnic background was identified (3,009 mothers). We excluded nonmarital birth mothers who later married the father of their child (396). We also dropped cases where the father had died or the mother reported that he has primary custody of the child (47 cases). Because we focused on fathers with identified racial and ethnic background, we dropped those who reported their race as non-Hispanic "other" (47 cases). We excluded mothers who reported cohabiting with the father of their child at all three survey waves (476) and included mothers who were not cohabiting at any given wave, even if they had cohabited at some point. This is because during the period of nonresidency, they would have been eligible for child support, and prior research suggests that once a child support order is in place, amending that order is difficult and not often done, especially among low-income families (Waller and Plotnick, 2001). Therefore, it is quite possible that there is a child support order in place even for couples who are currently cohabiting, if they were not cohabiting at some prior point.

Of the remaining 2,043 mothers who were eligible for child support, 45 were dropped due to missing data on the covariates. To minimize data loss, observations were dropped only for those variables that had fewer than 10 missing cases. For the remainder of the missing cases, dummy variables were created and included in the regressions. Finally, an additional 13 cases were dropped that were missing observations on whether there was a child support order. The final sample size was 1,985 mothers.

## **Appendix C: References**

## Appendix C: References

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## **Appendix D: Tables**

**Table 1: Determinants of Types of Child Support Order**

	Legal / No Order			Informal / No Order			Informal / Legal Order		
	Odds	S.E.	P	Odds	S.E.	P	Odds	S.E.	P
Black	0.51	0.03	***	0.80	0.09		1.58	0.18	***
Hispanic	0.44	0.03	***	0.73	0.11	*	1.66	0.24	**
Native American	0.39	0.06	***	0.75	0.23		1.93	0.59	*
Asian	0.61	0.10	**	0.98	0.31		1.59	0.51	
Age <=29	1.09	0.07		1.63	0.22	***	1.50	0.20	**
Age >=30 & <=39	1.10	0.06		1.20	0.15		1.09	0.14	
Never-Married	0.34	0.02	***	0.95	0.13		2.79	0.37	***
Remarried	0.75	0.05	***	0.53	0.10	***	0.71	0.12	*
Separated	0.40	0.03	***	1.53	0.20	**	3.78	0.49	***
High School Education	1.38	0.08	***	1.16	0.14		0.84	0.10	
Above High School Education	1.73	0.10	***	1.46	0.18	**	0.84	0.11	
2 Kids	1.66	0.08	***	1.65	0.17	***	1.00	0.10	
More than 2 Kids	1.81	0.11	***	1.46	0.19	**	0.80	0.10	
City	0.85	0.05	**	0.95	0.11		1.12	0.13	
Rural Area	1.17	0.06	**	0.97	0.11		0.83	0.09	
Year=1995	1.04	0.05		1.09	0.12		1.05	0.11	
Year=1997	0.94	0.05		1.00	0.11		1.07	0.12	
Log Likelihood	-8658.0								

Source: 1994–1998 Current Population Survey - Child Support Supplement (CPS-CSS).  
 N=11570. \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001.

**Table 2: Summary of Estimates for Variables Predicting Types of Reasons for Not Having a Child Support Order**

	Personal Choice vs. Objective Constraint		Both Reasons vs. Objective Constraint		With Order vs. Objective Constraint	
	B	Odds	B	Odds	B	Odds
Black	-0.46 ***	0.63	-0.14	0.87	-0.75 ***	0.47
Hispanic	-0.26	0.77	-0.20 *	0.81	-0.88 ***	0.41
Native American	-0.24	0.79	-0.05	0.95	-0.96 ***	0.38
Asian	0.12	1.13	0.14	1.16	-0.41 *	0.66
Age <=29	0.33 *	1.39	0.19 *	1.20	0.13	1.14
Age >=30 & <=39	0.09	1.09	0.16 *	1.18	0.15 *	1.16
Never-Married	-0.03	0.97	0.13	1.13	-1.03 ***	0.36
Remarried	0.15	1.16	0.15	1.17	-0.14	0.87
Separated	-0.07	0.93	0.11	1.11	-0.94 ***	0.39
High School Education	0.43 **	1.54	0.28 ***	1.32	0.45 ***	1.57
Above High School Education	0.56 ***	1.74	0.30 ***	1.35	0.67 ***	1.95
2 Kids	-0.20	0.81	-0.14	0.87	0.36 ***	1.43
More than 2 Kids	-0.51 **	0.60	-0.14	0.87	0.44 ***	1.56
City	-0.09	0.92	0.12	1.13	-0.12	0.88
Rural Area	0.14	1.15	0.10	1.11	0.22 **	1.24
Year=1995	-0.07	0.93	0.15 *	1.16	0.08	1.08
Year=1997	-0.01	0.99	0.05	1.05	-0.05	0.96
Intercept	-1.68 ***	1.19	-0.72 ***	0.49	1.08 ***	2.96
Log Likelihood	-11477.1					

Source: 1994–1998 Current Population Survey - Child Support Supplement (CPS-CSS).  
N=11,570. \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001.

**Table 3: Summary of Estimates for Variables Predicting Individual Reasons for Not Having a Child Support Order**

	Didn't Feel Need Legal Involvement		Didn't Want Contact with Father		Didn't Want Father To Pay		Father Can't Afford To Pay	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Black	-0.01	0.02	-0.08 ***	0.01	-0.06 ***	0.01	0.01	0.02
Hispanic	-0.01	0.02	0.00	0.02	-0.06 **	0.02	0.00	0.02
Native American	-0.04	0.04	0.05	0.04	-0.03	0.04	0.03	0.04
Asian	0.03	0.05	0.01	0.04	-0.02	0.04	0.01	0.05
Age <=29	0.06 **	0.02	0.05 **	0.02	-0.01	0.02	-0.01	0.02
Age >=30 & <=39	0.01	0.02	0.06 ***	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.02
Never-Married	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.02	-0.01	0.02
Remarried	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.02	-0.02	0.02
Separated	0.03	0.02	-0.03	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.02
High School Education	0.08 ***	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02
Above High School Ed.	0.10 ***	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	-0.02	0.02
2 Kids	-0.01	0.02	-0.04 **	0.01	-0.04 **	0.01	0.00	0.02
More than 2 Kids	-0.03	0.02	-0.05 **	0.02	-0.06 **	0.02	0.03	0.02
City	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.04 *	0.02
Rural Area	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.02
Year=1996	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01	-0.03 *	0.02
Year=1998	0.03	0.02	-0.01	0.01	-0.02	0.01	-0.06 ***	0.02
Constant	0.20 ***	0.03	0.16 ***	0.02	0.21 ***	0.02	0.27 ***	0.03

Table 3  
(Continued)

	Father Provides What He Can		Paternity Not Established		Unable to Locate Father		Child with Father Part Time	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Black	0.08 ***	0.02	-0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01	-0.04 ***	0.01
Hispanic	-0.06 **	0.02	0.05 **	0.02	0.02	0.02	-0.05 ***	0.01
Native American	0.00	0.04	-0.03	0.04	-0.04	0.03	0.01	0.03
Asian	-0.01	0.04	0.11 **	0.04	0.02	0.04	-0.02	0.03
Age <=29	0.04 *	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.01
Age >=30 & <=39	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.03 *	0.01	-0.01	0.01
Never-Married	-0.01	0.02	0.05 **	0.02	0.03 *	0.02	-0.02 *	0.01
Remarried	-0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	-0.03	0.02	0.01	0.01
Separated	0.04 *	0.02	-0.03	0.02	-0.03	0.02	-0.02	0.01
High School Education Above High School	0.03	0.02	-0.02	0.01	-0.01	0.01	0.03 *	0.01
Ed.	0.04 **	0.02	-0.08 ***	0.02	-0.05 ***	0.01	0.04 ***	0.01
2 Kids	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01	-0.01	0.01
More than 2 Kids	0.03	0.02	-0.02	0.02	-0.02	0.02	0.01	0.01
City	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Rural Area	0.03 *	0.02	-0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.02 *	0.01
Year=1996	0.01	0.01	0.12 ***	0.01	-0.03 *	0.01	0.03 **	0.01
Year=1998	0.00	0.01	0.09 ***	0.01	-0.05 ***	0.01	0.04 ***	0.01
Constant	0.15 ***	0.02	0.14 ***	0.02	0.17 ***	0.02	0.07 ***	0.02

Source: 1994-98 CPS-CSS. Sample limited to mothers without child support order.  
N=4,738. \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001.